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THESIS

**THE REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCES OF
COLOMBIA – PEOPLE'S ARMY (FARC-EP):
MARXIST-LENINIST INSURGENCY OR CRIMINAL
ENTERPRISE?**

by

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December 2005

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ARMY (FARC-EP):
MARXIST-LENINIST INSURGENCY OR CRIMINAL ENTERPRISE?**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia- People's Army (FARC-EP), Latin America's oldest and most powerful guerrilla organization, has not abandoned its ideological beliefs and devolved into a criminal enterprise as a result of its immersion in the drug trade and participation in other illicit activities. Rather, the movement remains an ideologically committed, guerrilla insurgency whose strategic objectives include the defeat of the Colombian military, the toppling of the central government, and the establishment of a regime founded on Marxist-Leninist and "Bolivarian" principles. While recognizing the important role that resources earned from criminal activities have played in strengthening the FARC-EP's challenge to the government, this thesis argues that the guerrilla organization's involvement in the drug trade serves exclusively as a means to an end.

However, numerous factors including recent changes in leadership, the recruitment of non-ideologically motivated and poorly educated fighters, and the increased operations tempo have led to the weakening of the ideological commitment of the base. Consequently, many of the FARC-EP's newer recruits are poorly educated in the political goals of the insurgency. This, combined with the weakening of the organization's leadership could result in the devolution of the FARC-EP into several criminal enterprises.

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I. INTRODUCTION



Figure 1. Political Map of Colombia¹

¹ La Comunidad Andina, "Mapa política de Colombia," http://www.comunidadandina.org/quienes/map_col.htm, accessed on 22 October 2005; Internet.

In the early 1980s, after nearly two fruitless decades of prolonged guerrilla warfare against the Government of Colombia, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC-EP), today Latin America’s oldest and most powerful Marxist-Leninst insurgency, was a small, peasant based, movement whose size and limited military capabilities made it hardly more than a nuisance to the ruling elites of Bogotá. Composed of less than a thousand members scattered among fifteen rural fronts, isolated in the backwaters of the Colombian periphery, the insurgency was expected to languish and eventually succumb to the combined assault of infectious tropical diseases and the Colombian military. However, not only did the FARC-EP not disappear, but in fact it metastasized into a “little guerrilla army” that today poses a serious challenge to Colombia’s political stability and economic development.

The FARC-EP’s evolution from a ragtag force composed of 1,000 combatants in 1982 to a “little guerrilla army” of 18,000 insurgents in 2000 was due largely to the organization’s participation in the drug trade and its involvement in other illegal, yet highly profitable activities. These illicit industries, which each year provide the insurgency with hundreds of millions of dollars in revenues, have allowed the FARC-EP to extend its control over forty per cent of the nation. However, the methods used to finance its war against the state have led some critics to allege that the organization has abandoned its ideological beliefs and quest for political power and devolved into a criminal enterprise focused primarily on profiting from illicit activities.

This thesis challenges this view. It argues that the FARC-EP is currently a hierarchically organized, politically motivated and ideologically driven insurgency whose objectives include the defeat of the Colombian military, the toppling of the central government, and the establishment of a socialist regime founded on Marxist-Leninist and “Bolivarian” principles. While recognizing the important role that resources earned from criminal activities have played in strengthening the FARC-EP’s challenge to the government, this thesis argues that the guerrilla organization’s involvement in the drug trade serves exclusively as a means to an end.

To ensure the guerrillas’ commitment to their cause and to prevent their degeneration into a criminal organization, the senior leadership of the FARC-EP has

centralized power in the Secretariat and *Estado Mayor Central*. It also implemented a draconian disciplinary system known as the *Reglamento de Régimen Disciplinario* that executes members who fail to adhere to the principles of the organization. In this way, the FARC-EP has been able to maintain discipline of the insurgency and channel the profits of its criminal activities toward political ends.

However, recent changes in leadership as well as the recruitment of non-ideologically motivated and poorly educated fighters have led to the weakening of the ideological commitment of the base. Additionally, the increased operations tempo has prevented the insurgency's leadership from dedicating sufficient time to the political indoctrination of guerrilla combatants. Consequently, many of the FARC-EP's newer recruits, while skilled guerrilla combatants, are poorly educated in the political goals of the insurgency. This, combined with the weakening of the organization's leadership could, if left unaddressed, result in the weakening of the ideological foundation of the insurgency, internal fragmentation, and devolution of the FARC-EP into several, small criminal enterprises.

The debate surrounding the ideological or criminal nature of the FARC-EP has long-term policy implications. If the FARC-EP is a not an ideologically committed guerrilla insurgency, but rather a criminal enterprise, then the organization can be attacked and disarticulated principally by police and judicial methods. However, if the FARC-EP is a politically aggrieved, revolutionary movement then a comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy must be developed and implemented which, while seeking to defeat the insurgency on the battlefield, also contemplates long-ranging social, economic, and political reforms designed to addresses the underlying causes of the conflict.

For the last forty-one years, the Government of Colombia has pursued strategies aimed at defeating a criminal enterprise rather than countering a guerrilla insurgency. As such, it has fought an undeclared war against “delinquents,” “bandits,” or more recently, “narco-terrorists.” However, the government’s refusal to recognize the true nature of the FARC-EP and to “know its enemy” has contributed to the prolongation of the conflict and the unintentional strengthening of the guerrilla movement. To defeat the FARC-EP, the government must develop a counterinsurgency strategy which attacks simultaneously

the organization on multiple levels. Some of these include the social, political, economic, and cultural levels. Only by adjusting its strategy to attack the FARC-EP as a guerrilla insurgency that is vying for political power will the government be able to defeat the movement.

This thesis draws heavily on Spanish-language analyses of the Colombian conflict and primary FARC-EP documents captured by the Colombian military in the last twenty years – sources that are often overlooked by U.S. analysts of the Colombian situation. It also incorporates information obtained through numerous interviews conducted with members of Colombia’s private and public sectors, demobilized FARC-EP guerrillas, representatives from the U.S. Embassy, Bogotá, Colombia, and members of the U.S. and Colombian academic communities.

This thesis examines the character of the FARC-EP at key moments in its development over the past two and a half decades (1982-2005). It assesses the effects of the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the repudiation of Marxist-Leninist thought in most former communist countries on the FARC-EP. Many observers hypothesized that the bankruptcy of international communism caused the guerrilla organization to abandon its ideological beliefs and to replace its revolutionary guerrilla struggle with a new *rason d'être* – the accumulation of vast financial revenues principally via its exploitation of the drug trade. Similarly, the guerrilla organization’s immersion in this illicit industry in the 1990s reinforced many critics’ belief that the organization had become the nation’s “third cartel.” This opinion was only strengthened in subsequent years when the FARC-EP took advantage of the government-ceded *despeje* (1998-2002), or demilitarized zone, to cultivate 35,000 hectares of coca. Its disingenuous participation in the peace talks with the administration of former President Andrés Pastrana Arango (1998-2002) and subsequent refusal to engage advancing Colombian military forces (2003-2005) confirmed in the minds of many that the FARC-EP’s political rhetoric was merely a smokescreen for its criminal enterprise. Finally, this thesis concludes by discussing policy and strategy implications both for Bogotá and Washington.

Chapter II examines the FARC-EP’s ability to survive the end of the Cold War by tracing the ideological, political-military, financial, and organizational development of

the FARC-EP in the 1980s. It argues that, despite the collapse of international communism and the bankruptcy of Marxist-Leninist thought, the FARC-EP did not experience an ideological crisis because the movement's heterogeneous and eclectic ideology was never based upon a dogmatic or mechanical interpretation of Marxist-Leninism. Rather it had employed a "liberal" interpretation of the communist ideology to guide the insurgency in its political growth and development. Similarly, the political and military actions of the FARC-EP during the 1980s illustrate that the organization's actions obeyed a revolutionary logic aimed at defeating the Colombian military and toppling the Government of Colombia. The guerrilla organization's involvement in the drug trade would play a key role in resourcing the FARC-EP to achieve its political-military objectives, to grow, and eventually extend its territorial control. Finally, the senior leadership's concentration of authority in the *Estado Mayor Central*, the creation of the Financial Commission, and the appointment of financial advisors, or *ayudantías*, ensured that guerrilla commanders used their allocated funds to achieve their assigned political-military goals and not surrender to the temptations of capitalist luxury.

Chapter III explains the FARC-EP's ability to maintain its revolutionary focus, despite its immersion in the drug trade, by examining the political-military, organizational dynamics, and financial resources of the insurgency during the 1990s. It shows that despite the guerrilla organization's greater involvement in the drug trade, the movement did not descend into criminality, but rather remained a revolutionary organization focused on achieving political power "through the barrel of a gun." From 1996-1998, the FARC-EP conducted a series of highly successful guerrilla offensives that inflicted tremendous losses on the Colombian military and caused many to think that the insurgency was winning the war. This would later prompt the United States and Colombia to increase its pressure on the guerrilla organization and to seek a military solution to the conflict. The FARC-EP's decision to conduct these offensives only makes sense in political-military terms, since a criminally motivated enterprise would have been content to maintain a low profile and take advantage of the coca boom created by declining coca production in Peru. This chapter details the rise of the movement's clandestine political party, the Colombian Clandestine Communist Party (PCCC), and highlights the launching of the insurgency's catch-all political movement, the Bolivarian

Movement for a New Colombia. Emphasis is also placed upon illustrating the FARC-EP's efforts to reorganize radically its internal structure so as to facilitate the accomplishment of its political-military objectives.

Chapter IV explains the FARC-EP's strategy to acquire political power between 1998 and 2005 by examining the political-military, organizational dynamics, finances, and ideology of the insurgency. This chapter argues that the FARC-EP participated disingenuously in the peace talks of 1999-2002 with the administration of President Andrés Pastrana (1998-2002) and utilized the government ceded demilitarized zone or *despeje* to further its political-military objectives. These goals included the opening of urban fronts and transforming the *despeje* into an “independent republic.” While recognizing the insurgency’s use of the *zona* to cultivate coca and to engage in other illicit activities, this chapter argues that the FARC-EP’s ideological compass was not affected as a result of its participation in these illicit activities. Chapter IV also examines the FARC-EP’s strategic withdrawal and dispersal throughout the country as a result of the Colombian military’s 2003-2005 offensive into the guerrilla organization’s strongholds. While recognizing that the FARC-EP’s commitment to its ideological beliefs has weakened, this chapter challenges contemporary arguments which interpret the FARC-EP’s withdrawal and avoidance of direct contact with military forces as evidence of the organization’s degeneration into a criminal organization. It argues that while the insurgency has been weakened, it has not been defeated. In fact, the FARC-EP is most likely waiting for the Colombian military to overextend and exhaust its forces before regrouping and attacking the military en masse.

Finally, after highlighting some lessons-learned, Chapter V concludes by offering four recommendations to the Government of Colombia. First, the Government of Colombia should focus its efforts on eliminating the principal leaders of the insurgency. Additionally, psychological operations should be conducted against both the rank and file guerrillas and their mid-level commanders. Second, additional emphasis should be placed upon attacking the finances of the guerrilla organization. Emphasis should be placed upon destroying the insurgency’s primary cash crops and on freezing its financial assets. Third, the Colombian military should revisit its conceptualization of the FARC-EP and the organization’s *modus operandi*. By continuing to view the FARC-EP as

nothing more than a criminal organization and failing “to know their enemy,” the Colombian military will continue to prolong the conflict and indirectly add to the strengthening of the insurgency. Finally, the Government of Colombia should address legitimate social grievances and implement a meaningful agrarian land reform program that aims at resolving one of the primary causes of the ongoing conflict – the perennial issue of land tenure. Additional financial resources should also be dedicated to improving the social infrastructure of the nation’s rural communities and of those areas formerly under guerrilla control. In this manner, the state can extend its presence to the periphery of the nation, improve its legitimacy in the eyes of the rural populace, and prevent the FARC-EP from attempting to reassert its control over those communities.

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II. A BLUEPRINT FOR WAR: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FARC-EP'S "STRATEGIC PLAN" (1982-1989)

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, People's Army, as the most elevated expression of the revolutionary struggle for national liberation, is a political-military movement that carries out its ideological, political, organizational, propagandistic, and armed guerrilla actions, in agreement with the tactic of the combination of all forms of struggle, in order to achieve power for the people.²

The Statutes of the FARC-EP, Chapter One, Article One

A. INTRODUCTION

Throughout Latin America, and indeed much of the world, Marxist-Leninist based revolutionary movements entered into decline with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The ideological crisis occasioned by the collapse of international communism caused organizations to lose adherents, to fragment as internal factions disputed the appropriate way ahead, or to seek compromise with their erstwhile foes. The FARC-EP, in contrast, , expanded its membership and territory and became more intransigent and aggressive in the wake of the end of the Cold War. This chapter argues that the paradoxical strengthening of the FARC-EP can only be understood by examining the events of the 1980s. It shows that the 1980s – *not* the end of the Cold War in 1989 -- represented a critical turning point in the FARC-EP's development as a revolutionary organization. During this decade the movement designed an all-encompassing strategy that enabled it to grow from an ill-equipped and poorly trained guerrilla insurgency composed of 1,000 combatants distributed among 17 rural and impoverished fronts in 1982 to a “little guerrilla army” composed of 17,000 combatants assigned to 60 fronts by 2000. The decade also witnessed, via the convening of peace talks with the presidential administrations of Belisario Betancur (1982-1986) and Virgilio Barco Vargas (1986-1990), the emergence of the FARC-EP as an astute political actor and accomplished negotiator. As a result, the FARC-EP would not only survive the end of the Cold War but, by 1996, threaten the Colombian military and Government of Colombia with imminent defeat.

² All translations from the Spanish are the author's unless otherwise indicated.

Some observers have argued that the FARC-EP was able to survive the end of the Cold War because it had become an essentially criminal organization by 1989. As such, it experienced no ideological crisis with the collapse of the Soviet Union and, instead, had a new motive for persisting and even thriving as an organization – the exploitation of the drug trade. This chapter rejects these arguments by examining the ideological, political-military, financial, and organizational development of the FARC-EP in the 1980s. It shows that despite the collapse of international communism and the bankruptcy of Marxist-Leninist thought, the FARC-EP did not experience an ideological crisis. This was due to the fact that the movement’s heterogeneous and eclectic ideology was never based upon a dogmatic or mechanical interpretation of Marxist-Leninism, but rather employed a liberal interpretation of the same in order to guide the insurgency in its political growth and development.

Similarly, the political and military actions of the FARC-EP during the 1980s illustrate that the organization’s actions obeyed a revolutionary logic aimed at defeating the Colombian military and toppling the Government of Colombia. These actions, which did not limit themselves exclusively to guerrilla warfare, but rather encompassed efforts to attain political power via the organization’s clandestine and overt participation in the nation’s political process, illustrate the FARC-EP’s efforts to become a viable political force and not a criminal organization. The FARC-EP engaged in criminal activity in order to acquire the financial resources necessary for sustaining its growth and territorial expansion. The procurement of resources by any means possible was decided upon at the organization’s 1982 Seventh Guerrilla Conference as key to its transformation into a “little guerrilla army.” Therefore, the FARC-EP’s increased involvement in this illicit industry should not be interpreted as the transformation of the organization into another narco-trafficking cartel, but rather as a means for securing the financial wherewithal required to finance its revolutionary intent.

Efforts aimed at ensuring that revenues obtained from the movement’s participation in the drug trade and other illicit activities were used for revolutionary and not criminal purposes led to the creation of the FARC-EP Financial Commission. This institution, composed of members from the organization’s senior-most ranks, was entrusted with the responsibility of managing the insurgency’s finances. The Financial

Commission was granted the authority to establish yearly budgets for each of the FARC-EP's fronts and to serve as the central clearinghouse for all financial matters. To further its control over subordinate units and to ensure that all profits and material goods made their way to the Financial Commission, unit-level finance commissions were established. Additionally, financial advisors, known as *ayudantías*, were assigned to each FARC-EP front and charged with ensuring that unit-level commanders used their allocated funds to achieve political and military objectives. Those commanders failing to achieve their assigned objectives or suspected of taking part in criminal activities were remanded to the Financial Commission for trial and punishment.

Finally, in order to accomplish its revolutionary objectives and to assure its control over its subordinate units, the senior-leadership of the FARC-EP centralized its power in the *Estado Mayor Central* (EMC). This institution became the nerve center of the FARC-EP - responsible for the overall strategic guidance of the organization. The senior leadership also created numerous training centers and academies in order to prepare promising FARC-EP combat leaders for greater levels of responsibility and command authority. In addition individuals suspected of engaging in criminal activities were eliminated. In this manner, the FARC-EP sought to solidify its members' adherence to the revolutionary principles and codes of conduct of the organization while purging those motivated by profit and self-aggrandizement.

The 1980s marked a turning point in the FARC-EP's evolution as a revolutionary organization. After reflecting upon the vegetative growth and limited successes enjoyed by the organization in the previous two decades (1964-1982), the senior-leadership of the organization realized that radical changes would have to be made if the FARC-EP were to achieve real political power.

B. IDEOLOGY

Some critics allege that FARC-EP was able to survive the ideological crisis occasioned by the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of international communism, and the bankrupting of Marxist-Leninism by abandoning its communist ideology and devolving into a criminal organization that was driven by an unquenchable thirst for

greater revenues.³ According to this argument, the FARC-EP began to replace Soviet materiel aide in the early 1980s with profits earned through its participation in the illicit drug trade and involvement in other illegal activities.

The 1989 collapse of international communism did not occasion a crisis within the FARC-EP for two main reasons. First, Marxist-Leninism was only one part of the insurgency's hybrid ideological belief set. This lack of a defined ideology is perfectly consistent with Colombian history, where for more than a century supporters of Liberal and Conservative Parties took machetes to each other in defense of principles which everyone would have been at pains to describe. The purpose of parties is to create subnational loyalties and networks in a country where the sense of national identity is weak, and where the absence of effective government forces citizens to organize to protect their interests and their lives. Therefore, the FARC-EP's "big tent" approach emphasizes its connectivity with Colombian reality rather than its dependence on the globalized fate of communism. The remaining components of the insurgency's ideology encompassed principles based upon agrarian land reform, socialism, and Bolivarianism. The hybrid nature of the FARC-EP's political ideology was and continues to be reflected in the eclectic membership of the insurgency. In fact, the FARC-EP finds its unity not in its ideology, but in its strategy, which is its commitment to the "armed struggle."

During the 1980s, the FARC-EP consisted of guerrillas who espoused Liberal, socialist, and Marxist-Leninist beliefs. However, no single ideology dominated, but rather combined with elements from political belief sets to produce an ideological cocktail unique to the FARC-EP. Manuel Marulanda Vélez, the supreme commander of the guerrilla organization, stated, "Well, within our organization there is a little bit of everything. There are also Marxist-Leninists. But the FARC-EP are before anything else an armed and guerrilla organization that has its doors open to all political, philosophical, religious, and ideological tendencies. The FARC-EP allows for people who share the common ideal of liberating the country to come and work together."⁴

³ See William W. Mendel, "Colombia's Threat to Regional Security," *Military Review*, (May-June 2001): 3.

⁴ Carlos Arango Z, *FARC-EP, Veinte Años: De Marquetalia a la Uribe* (Bogotá: Ediciones Aurora, 1984), 120.

The ideological diversity of the FARC-EP can be explained in part by considering the social class backgrounds of the original members who joined the organization. Many of the founding members of the guerrilla movement had previously belonged to one of the nine so-called “peasant republics” that were destroyed by the Colombian Army during the Presidential administration of Carlos Lleras Restrepo (1964-1970). The peasants who belonged to these communities were largely drawn from the Communist and Liberal parties. However, other apolitical individuals – usually members of local, non-Spanish speaking, indigenous tribes or communities - also coexisted with the aforementioned groups. The interaction of the communists, socialists, and indigenous peoples produced an ideology and way of life unique to the “peasant republics.” Later, when the FARC-EP was established, many former members of the “peasant republics” joined the guerrilla organization. In this manner, the heterogeneous ideology of the “peasant republics” was preserved and incorporated into the belief set of the FARC-EP.⁵

Second, the FARC-EP never applied a literal interpretation of Marxist-Leninism to its political cause, but rather borrowed from its general thoughts and principles to construct its own political reality. Current FARC-EP political ideologue and senior member of the insurgency, Iván Ríos, explains the use and nature of Marxist-Leninism within the insurgency:

We borrow from Marxism but not in a dogmatic manner. There are a few general points in common from the historical point of view that are applicable, and in fact if you sit down and read our documents you'll see there are a few quotes or citations that we use textually, because we take the general concepts and then apply them to the Colombian reality. Obviously, if you are going to build a house, you have to have some kind of idea how to do it. But how are we going to build it? That's a problem that we haven't been able to solve here. Let's say that that's how we approach Marxism, we borrow from the general concepts....For us, the fundamental postulates, general proposals, methodology of knowing and understanding society and of historic evolution, and society's contradictions that Marxism discusses are still valid concerns. Marxist

⁵ For additional information regarding the “peasant republics” and the founding members of the FARC-EP see, Eduardo Pizarro Leongómez, *Las FARC (1949-1966) De la autodefensa a la combinación de todas las formas de lucha*, with the collaboration of Ricardo Peñaranda (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo Editores, 1991), 39-54, 167-186.

philosophy, class struggle, the concept of Marxist political economy, the Marxist understanding of capitalism, those are the basic concepts to which we subscribe.⁶

As a result, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the international repudiation of communism as a failed political ideology did not affect the FARC-EP's devotion to Marxist-Leninism or revolution. As one recently demobilized FARC-EP political ideologue -- citing Iván Márquez -- stated, "The FARC doesn't owe one peso or one idea to anyone and because of that not one brick from the Berlin Wall ever fell on the FARC."⁷ FARC-EP commander Fernando Caycedo explains:

That Marxist-Leninism operated in one way or another in the Soviet Union, that's the Soviet Union's problem. We're in Colombia. Here there are other realities, we're living in different times. We have to apply Marxism to the Colombian reality and to the historic moment in which we live. This isn't about mechanically copying Marxism or saying that we want to apply Soviet-style Marxism to Colombia. As if to say that as communists we never make mistakes. We think that the greatest virtue and principle of the communists is criticism and self-criticism, recognizing when we're wrong. If we didn't, we would continue to create the same mistakes.⁸

The ideological eclecticism and vitality of the FARC-EP is evidenced by its 1988 initiation of a successful recruiting campaign based upon a new addition to its ideological belief set – Bolivarianism. This ideological concept, based very loosely upon the political philosophies of Simón Bolívar, the great South American general who liberated the Andean region of the continent from Spanish control during the colonial Wars of Independence, emphasizes Latin American political, military, and economic unity and espouses a strong anti-imperialistic policy especially towards the United States and Europe. Bolivarianism's emphasis on the expropriation and devolution of land to indigenous peoples, denunciation of inherited social class privileges, and calls for upward social mobility for members of the army is aimed at urban, lower-middle class workers,

⁶ Juan Guillermo Ferro Medina and Graciela Uribe Ramón, *El orden de la guerra* (Bogotá: Centro Editorial Javeriano, 2002), 122.

⁷ A demobilized mid-level, FARC-EP guerrilla who served as a political ideologue for the guerrilla organization for more than ten years (identity withheld by request), interview by author, tape recording, Bogotá, Colombia, 20 September 2005.

⁸ Anonymous, "Así son las FARC-EP: Entrevista con Fernando Caycedo," available from <http://sodcolsoli.www3.50megs.com/fcay.htm>; Internet; accessed on 2 February 2005.

scholars, and artisans.⁹ Consequently, the FARC-EP's adoption of Bolivarianism not only allowed the organization to increase its numbers, but also to diversify its membership. It is important to note that the shift to Bolivarianism preceded the end of the Cold War and was largely motivated by the FARC-EP's desire beginning in 1982 to expand its appeal in the urban sectors of society.¹⁰

Prior to 1988, the insurgency had been an overwhelmingly rural, peasant-based phenomenon whose members generally possessed a primary school level of education. However, following the FARC-EP's stepped-up recruiting effort, the ranks of the guerrilla organization swelled to include high school and university graduates from the nation's middle and upper classes. Intellectuals, students, professionals, doctors, lawyers, Catholic priests, and university professors all joined the FARC-EP during the 1980s.¹¹ Bolivarianism appealed to many different social classes and professions due to its inclusion of "...a series of proposals that combined nationalist and leftwing ideas, but that sidelined traditional ultimate ideological goals such as the establishment of a classical socialist model."¹² The FARC-EP's professed allegiance to this ideology as well as its increased attacks against the Government of Colombia for failing to solve "...the country's biggest problems (social inequality, crime, and deficient public services)" allowed it to gain territory in the battle for new and better educated recruits.¹³

For instance, former FARC-EP Finance Minister Juvenal Ovidio Ricardo Palmera Piñeda, alias Simón Trinidad, prior to becoming the FARC-EP's chief of finances, was a banker and member of Colombia's high society.¹⁴ However, following the 1986-1988 assassination of some 550 members of the FARC-EP's political party, the Patriotic Union

9 Ferro Medina and Uribe Ramón, *El orden de la guerra*, 127.

10 Román D. Ortiz, "Insurgent Strategies in the Post-Cold War: The Case of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 25 (2002): 130-131.

11 Arango Z, *FARC-EP, Veinte Años: De Marquetalia a la Uribe*, 33.

12 Ortiz, "Insurgent Strategies in the Post-Cold War: The Case of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia," 130.

13 *Ibid.*

14 Anonymous, "Colombia Extradites Rebel Leader 'Trinidad';" available from <http://www.educweb.org/webnews/ColNews-Jan05/English/Articles/ColombieunmembredeFARC-EPex.html>; Internet; accessed 14 April 2005.

(UP), he became radicalized and joined the FARC-EP. Rising quickly through the ranks, Trinidad eventually became a member of the organization's senior staff – the Secretariat – where he oversaw and directed the finances of the insurgency.

C. POLITICAL-MILITARY

The FARC-EP's decision to innovate ideologically and its attempt to appeal to urban sectors on the basis of Bolivarianism was largely the product of the organization's assessment of its own failures during the Seventh Guerrilla Conference. Held from 4-14 May 1982 in the mountainous Sumapaz region of Cubarral, Meta, the conference resulted in a shift from a strategy that focused on the territorial defense of small areas of land under guerrilla influence, to an offensive strategy that sought to defeat the Colombian military and occupy new territory. Failed peace negotiations with the Government of Colombia during the 1980s and the assassination of thousands of its members who attempted to participate in politics would only confirm for the FARC-EP the wisdom of its decision to boost decisively its military capabilities.

After nearly two decades (1964-1982) of sustained guerrilla warfare against the Colombian military, the FARC-EP in 1982 consisted of only 1,000 guerrilla fighters dispersed among 17 rural and ill-equipped fronts scattered throughout the nation.¹⁵ The organization remained an overwhelmingly rural, peasant-based phenomenon that derived its limited support from that agrarian-based social class upon which it depended for virtually all of its political, military, and logistical needs. Militarily, the organization continued to operate much as it had in the previous eighteen years – focusing its efforts on carrying out uncoordinated and largely ineffective hit-and-run guerrilla attacks against small and poorly defended Colombian military and National Police units.¹⁶ Politically, the insurgency proselytized to and recruited from peasant farmers living in traditional areas of guerrilla influence located in southern and southwestern Colombia. However, lacking sufficient manpower, a coherent political and military strategy, and the financial means to purchase the military equipment that would allow them to achieve significant military victories, the FARC-EP in 1982 remained an isolated nuisance whose

¹⁵ Arturo Alape, *Tirofijo: Los sueños y las montañas*, 2d ed. (Bogotá: Editorial planeta colombiana, 2002), 183.

¹⁶ Colombian Army, “*Procedimientos delictivos de las FARC-EP: Combinación de todas las formas de lucha*,” Unpublished Colombian Army Internal Document, May 2000, 5.

“vegetative growth”,¹⁷ provoked little to no concern among Colombia’s urban-based elites and senior civilian and military leadership. The organization’s high command, well aware of the insurgency’s lack of progress, realized that radical changes would have to be made if the FARC-EP were to triumph over the Colombian military and achieve its revolutionary goals. These changes, which would forever transform the outlook and strategic behavior of the FARC-EP, would first be discussed at the insurgency’s Seventh Guerrilla Conference.

The continued, rapid urbanization of Colombian society and its impact on the FARC-EP dominated the discussions. As FARC-EP leaders realized, social conditions had significantly changed since the war began in 1964. No longer was Colombia a predominantly rural society, but had become a highly urbanized nation with fully 70% of the populace residing in the country’s primary and secondary cities.¹⁸ Consequently, the FARC-EP’s political and military strategy had to change in order to reflect the environment in which the insurgency was operating.

The massive influx of rural-based citizens to the nation’s cities created numerous social problems throughout the country. Those migrants who were fortunate enough to find jobs were often poorly paid and forced to work long hours in terrible conditions. In the meantime, those who arrived from the countryside unskilled and academically unprepared to work in the country’s cities resorted to crime and other means of survival. The growing dissatisfaction with their new urban lives caused many migrant workers to carry out strikes, demonstrations, and other forms of social protest that did not go unnoticed by the FARC-EP. In fact, the insurgency developed a political-military-social-and economic strategy that sought to capitalize upon this urban unrest. The then leading Marxist-Leninist political ideologue of the FARC-EP, Luís Morantes (better known by his *nom de guerre* Jacobo Arenas), explains:¹⁹

¹⁷ Eduardo Pizarro Leongómez, *Una democracia asediada: Balance y perspectivas del conflicto armado en Colombia*, (Bogotá: Editorial Norma, 2004), 87.

¹⁸ Alape, *Tirofijo: Los sueños y las montañas*, 180.

¹⁹ Arango Z, *FARC-EP, Veinte Años: De Marquetalia a la Uribe*, 54.

In the [Seventh Guerrilla] conference it was said: the persistence of social struggles has to be given a new emphasis. And the FARC-EP must design a strategy that responds to the social conditions that exist within the nation. And in the conference it was decided that the FARC-EP had to develop a struggle that would tie the armed revolutionary activities of the countryside with the insurrectional activities of the country's major cities.... That is to say, everything should function as one strategic concept that would serve to define the taking of power.....²⁰

To increase urban support for the FARC-EP and to establish a nexus between the rural based FARC-EP units and their urban based sympathizers, the senior members of the FARC-EP created Solidarity Nuclei (*los Núcleos de Solidaridad*).²¹ These clandestine political organizations were charged with organizing “the masses” into syndicates and other community based organizations that would rally in support of leftwing politicians that were sympathetic to the FARC-EP. The guerrilla members were also responsible for convincing local residents to vote in support of politicians and measures that indirectly benefited the guerrilla organization. Finally, Solidarity Nuclei members were tasked with the infiltration of primary and secondary schools, universities, and community action groups.²² Supreme FARC-EP commander Manuel Marulanda underscored the importance of the FARC-EP’s clandestine participation in politics when he stated, “We have shown that the fight has to be waged not only on the military level, but also on the political. In those conditions it is only natural that we are going to intervene, where the conditions permit us, in the political struggle.”²³ In this manner, the FARC-EP was able to bridge the gap between the rural and urban divide and unify its supporters behind its political-military strategy – known as the “Strategic Plan for Taking Power” - for achieving revolutionary power.

The all-inclusive, eight year-long (1982-1990), “Strategic Plan for Taking Power” was divided into three phases – offensive, government, and defense of the revolution –²⁴

²⁰ Alape, *Tirofijo: Los sueños y las montañas*, 180.

²¹ FARC-EP, “Informe central a la septima conferencia,” *Historia de las FARC*, Unpublished FARC-EP Internal Document, 17.

²² Alape, *Tirofijo: Los sueños y las montañas*, 178.

²³ Arango Z, FARC-EP, *Veinte Años: De Marquetalia a la Uribe*, 111.

²⁴ Colombian Army, “Apreciación evolutiva de las FARC-EP,” Unpublished Colombian Army Internal Document, May 2000, 5.

that were designed to weaken and later topple the central government and to guide their actions once in power. According to the strategy, the political and military actions of the rural and urban guerrillas and their support networks would facilitate the development of the “necessary conditions” required for fomenting large-scale popular insurrections throughout the country. Once these strikes, protests, and other manifestations of political and social discontent occurred, the FARC-EP expected the Colombian military – in a virtual reenactment of the events associated with the 1948 Bogotazo and subsequent 1951 *coup d'etat* led by General Rojas Pinilla - to attempt to regain control over the nation by seizing power. Jacobo Arenas articulated the FARC-EP’s intentions when in response to the question, “Is the FARC-EP becoming the subjective factor that will produce a situation similar to what we saw on 9 April 1948?” he stated:²⁵

Naturally. It has to be that way. We have to play a directing role in the insurrectional process. But not just us. The workers, if they’re able to unite, will also play a key role....The revolutionary political parties will also play an important role. The Colombian Communist Party will play a very important role. We assign to the Communist Party that great mission that other communist parties have played in other revolutionary processes that have taken place in other countries.²⁶

Upon the Colombian military’s overthrow of the civilian government and establishment of a military dictatorship, the FARC-EP planned, in coordination with its urban and rural supporters, to stage a military offensive against Bogotá that would isolate it from the rest of the nation and, after a prolonged siege, eventually lead to the city’s capitulation. In the meantime, general insurrections carried out in the country’s primary and secondary cities would distract and preoccupy the Colombian military and Colombian National Police allowing the bulk of the FARC-EP’s guerrilla army to encircle, besiege, and eventually storm the city of Bogotá. Once the capital fell, the Strategic Plan for Taking Power called for the FARC-EP to establish a provisional revolutionary regime that later would call for the creation of a constituent assembly

²⁵ On 9 April 1948, Liberal Party presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was assassinated in Bogotá provoking a violent insurrection between Liberal and Conservative party members that claimed the lives of an estimated 3,000 people and left large sections of the capital in ruins.

²⁶ Arango Z, *FARC-EP, Veinte Años: De Marquetalia a la Uribe*, 45.

charged with drafting a new constitution. The provisional revolutionary regime would remain in power until the new constitution was created and the new, revolutionary government established.

To accomplish this, Manuel Marulanda Vélez and his senior staff recognized at the Seventh Guerrilla Conference the need to construct a “little guerrilla army.” According to FARC-EP documents, the military portion of the plan called for the creation of a revolutionary guerrilla army composed of some 28,000 guerrilla combatants, distributed among 48 guerrilla fronts that would be capable of challenging and soundly defeating the regular Colombian military.²⁷ To highlight the FARC-EP’s transition to a “little guerrilla army,” the senior leadership changed the name of the organization from its original FARC to FARC-EP – adding two additional letters – “EP”- signifying “People’s Army.” Although a seemingly unimportant addition, these two letters had a significant impact on how the organization’s members conceived of themselves and the insurgency. Instead of identifying themselves as a revolutionary organization focused on survival and the defense of small, rural territories, the Seventh Guerrilla Conference provided the insurgency with an offensive strategic plan and course of action. No longer would the FARC-EP remain a political, social, and military ambiguity largely ignored and depreciated by society, but rather would emerge as a revolutionary army capable of defeating the Colombian military and bringing to fruition its revolutionary plan of action. “The Seventh Conference gave the movement a clear operational and strategic conception for forming a revolutionary army, which marked a readjustment of all its mechanisms for guidance and control.”²⁸

To set the stage for this revolutionary showdown, special emphasis was placed upon establishing a so-called “axis of strategic deployment” (*el eje de despliegue estratégico*) in the Eastern Mountain range. To this end, at least twelve fronts were to be assigned to this key area and placed in a chain formation that would link la Uribe, Meta

²⁷ Thomas Marks, “Colombian Army (COLAR) Counterinsurgency,” *Crime, Law, and Social Change* 40 (2003): 5.

²⁸ María Alejandra Vélez, “FARC-EP-ELN: Evolución y Expansión Territorial.” *Tesis de Pregrado en Economía, Universidad de los Andes*, Colombian Ministry of Defense, available from http://www.mindefensa.gov.co/conflicto_armado/subversion/historiasubversion.pdf; Internet; accessed on 2 April 2005.

department – the city in which the FARC-EP’s former headquarters, La Casa Verde, was located - with Venezuela.²⁹ In this manner, the Eastern half of the country, consisting of the regions known as *la Orinoquía* and *la Amazonía* – were to be cut off and isolated from the rest of the nation. The FARC-EP senior leadership also ordered the creation of numerous fronts charged with the encirclement and besieging of Bogotá.

The Conference attendees ordered the creation of a hierarchical military chain of command for each specific level of guerrilla authority. Additionally, each level of guerrilla command was assigned specific political-military objectives to be accomplished within each unit’s geographic region of the country. Above all, FARC-EP senior leadership emphasized the importance of linking insurgent attacks to the successful accomplishment of political-military objectives. If an assault or attack against a given target did not accomplish a given political-military objective, it was to be avoided at all costs.

Finally, the Seventh guerrilla conference acted to change the manner in which the FARC-EP operated at a tactical level. For the previous twenty years, the insurgency had largely been a defensive organization that had carried out uncoordinated, guerrilla attacks against largely unsuspecting Colombian military and CNP forces. The guerrillas took advantage of the Colombian military’s preference for large-scale, conventional tactics that were entirely ill-suited to the environment. As a result, the FARC-EP was able to harass and inflict some limited damage upon the Colombian military and CNP. However, by the early 1980s, the insurgency’s enemies had learned from their mistakes and were successfully employing highly effective counter-guerrilla tactics against the FARC-EP. Caught off guard by the Colombian Army’s (COLAR) sudden transition to irregular warfare and successful implementation of counter guerrilla tactics, the FARC-EP quickly began to take significant losses. A panic settled in as the Colombian military time and again dealt significant blows to the guerrilla organization.

The FARC-EP’s senior leadership addressed this crisis at the Seventh Guerrilla Conference by developing a new tactical operating procedure by which it could strike at

²⁹ Colombian Army, “*Apreciación evolutiva de las FARC-EP*,” May 2000, location of publication and author are unknown, 5.

and defeat the Colombian military. This new method of guerrilla warfare, known as the “new method of operating” (*el nuevo método de operar*)³⁰, emphasized the use of highly mobile, heavily armed, guerrilla elements that conducted coordinated attacks against Colombian military targets. Emphasis was placed upon the coordinated use of offensive military units operating in secrecy that tracked down, attacked, and destroyed COLAR counter guerrilla units and related military targets. Three key elements – surprise, mobility, and secrecy³¹ – served as the guiding principles for planning and carrying out attacks against the Colombian military.

However, before this new strategy could be implemented, former President Belisario Betancur surprised everyone by announcing on inauguration day, 7 August 1982, his intention to conduct the country’s first-ever peace talks with the nation’s insurgent organizations. As a result, the implementation of the “new method of operating” and its accompanying “Strategic Plan for Taking Power”, were temporarily placed on the backburner until late-1989. In the meantime the FARC-EP engaged in an unsuccessful, six year-long peace process (1982-1988) first with the Betancur and later the Virgilio Barco Vargas administrations. However, by the time the FARC-EP withdrew from the peace process in 1988, it had achieved something that it had not accomplished in the previous twenty four years of political and military struggle – official recognition as a political actor. Additionally, the assassination of hundreds of Patriotic Union (UP) candidates at the hands of the paramilitaries and the unwillingness of the “fascist” Colombian military to comply with the orders of the “oligarchic” central government would convince the FARC-EP that a political resolution to the conflict was not possible at that time.

1. Belisario Betancur and the Peace Process (1982-1986)

Armed with a strategic political-military plan and better organized than ever before in the insurgency’s history, the FARC-EP set out in late May 1982 to begin what it recognized would be a prolonged struggle against the Government of Colombia. However, the presidential inauguration of Belisario Betancur on 7 August 1982 and his

³⁰ Alape, *Tirofijo: Los sueños y las montañas*, 178.

³¹ FARC-EP, “*Plan Militar de Despegue y Empate con el de 8 años*,” *Historia de las FARC*, Unpublished FARC-EP Document.

surprise decision to conduct the country's first-ever peace talks with the nation's guerrilla organizations, led the FARC-EP to decrease temporarily its participation in armed guerrilla actions ostensibly in order to pursue peace negotiations.

The Betancur administration's peace process consisted of three parts. First, under Congressional law 35, signed on 18 November 1982, a general amnesty was granted to all guerrilla combatants. Second, the administration recognized the need to broaden and amplify participation in the nation's political system. Third, peace talks were scheduled with the nation's various insurgent groups.³² Two governmental commissions - the Peace Commission (*la Comisión de Paz*) and the Multipartite Political Summit (*la Cumbre Política Multipartidaria*) were created to carry out the so-called "great dialogue" between the Government of Colombia, Colombian political and civil society, and the guerrilla organizations. However, no sooner was the Multipartite Political Summit created, than it quickly languished and was quietly abandoned because of the unwillingness of many of the Summit's participants, which included a broad range of representatives from the political parties and private sector, to participate in the "great dialogue" with the subversive organizations. This left the Peace Commission as the only viable mechanism for conducting talks with the guerrillas.

The Colombian military reacted harshly to the initiation of peace talks with the guerrillas. Then Minister of Defense, General Fernando Landazábal, expressed his contempt for the peace process and stated that the Colombian military would not accept any truce reached between the various guerrilla insurgencies and the Government of Colombia. The General would subsequently write in his 1985 book, *El precio de la paz*, that the peace talks were "the new strategic model...for guaranteeing the ascendance of subversion throughout the American continent."³³ As a result of Landazábal's public defiance of civil authority, the general was relieved of his position and subsequently retired.

³² Socorro Ramírez, "El proceso de paz de Belisario Betancur", in *Tiempos de Paz: Acuerdos en Colombia, 1902-1994*, eds. Medófilo Medina and Efraín Sánchez (Bogotá: Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá D.C., 2003), 273.

³³ Socorro Ramírez, "El proceso de paz de Belisario Betancur", in *Tiempos de Paz: Acuerdos en Colombia, 1902-1994*, eds. Medófilo Medina and Efraín Sánchez (Bogotá: Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá D.C., 2003), 281.

The FARC-EP, upon learning of the government's offer to hold peace talks, appointed its own National Peace Commission headed by Jacobo Arenas. For fourteen months, from 30 January, 1983 to 28 March 1984, representatives from the FARC-EP and Government of Colombia met to discuss a political solution to the then twenty year-old conflict. Finally, on 28 March 1984 *el Acuerdo de la Uribe* was reached between the two parties. According to the terms of this document, the FARC-EP agreed to a year-long, unilateral ceasefire beginning on 28 May 1984.³⁴ Second, the FARC-EP condemned kidnapping and promised to cease its participation in the illegal activity pending the government's compliance with the terms of the accord. Third, although the Government of Colombia did not grant official demilitarized status to the region located between La Uribe and Guayabero in the department of Meta, it agreed to prohibit Colombian military and police forces from operating in that region.³⁵

The Agreement of La Uribe also created a Verification Commission (*una Comisión de Verificación*) that, upon determining that hostilities had in fact ceased between the Government of Colombia and FARC-EP, would grant the guerrilla insurgency one year from the day of that determination to organize itself politically, socially, and economically as it saw fit. On 26 November, 1984, at a meeting that took place at an unknown location simply referred to as La Esperanza, the FARC-EP recommended to the Verification Commission that it report to the Government of Colombia that hostilities between the two parties had ended. The insurgency then requested on the same date to be allowed to begin preparations beginning 1 December, 1984, to organize a legitimate political party. The Government of Colombia later granted the FARC-EP's request and, three months later, on 7 March 1985, the guerrilla organization's political party, the Patriotic Union (*la Unión Patriótica*), was born. However, the creation of the UP did not mark an end to the FARC-EP's insurrectional

³⁴ The Government of Colombia later imposed its own ceasefire which corresponded with that of the FARC-EP. However, both parties would later be guilty of violating the terms and conditions of the cease fire on numerous occasions.

³⁵ Alberto Rojas Puyo, "El Acuerdo de la Uribe: una política que no ha perdido validez," in *Tiempos de Paz: Acuerdos en Colombia, 1902-1994*, eds. Medófilo Medina and Efraín Sánchez (Bogotá: Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá D.C., 2003), 292.

political or military objectives, but rather signified a diversification of the insurgency's strategy to include a fight for power within the legitimate political process. In this way, the FARC-EP consummated its old strategy of "struggle by all means possible".

2. The End of the Peace Process and the Road to War (1986-1989)

The UP made its official debut in November 1985 and shortly thereafter began to prepare for the local and national-level elections of 1986. In August 1986, the UP scored some impressive electoral victories. Voters elected "...fourteen congress members to the Senate and the House (among them Iván Márquez, current member of the FARC-EP's Secretariat), eighteen deputies in eleven departmental assemblies, and 335 counselors in 187 councils, tripling the vote the Left traditionally received."³⁶ Perhaps of greatest significance, however, is the fact that the UP presidential candidate, Jaime Pardo Leal, received 350,000 votes, or 4.5 percent of the total vote – this after the party had only been in existence for some eight months.³⁷

But the victory enjoyed by the leftwing UP would soon be cut short as members of anti-communist, paramilitary, death squads, allegedly guided by Colombian intelligence, conducted violent, assassination campaigns against the political party and its supporters. Between 1985 and mid-1988, some 550 members of the UP, including 1986 presidential candidate Jaime Pardo Leal and four UP congressmen, were murdered.³⁸ Pardo Leal's replacement for the 1990 presidential elections, Bernardo Jaramillo Ossa, would later be assassinated in March of that same year. By 1998, some 4,000 UP and Colombian Communist Party (PCC) members would be killed, which allowed the FARC-EP plausibly to assert that the Colombian elites and military would never allow a leftist party even to participate in the political process.

In the meantime President Virgilio Barco Vargas (1986-1990), who came into office on 7 August 1986, surprised many when he announced early in his administration

³⁶ FARC-EP. "The Illegality of 'Legal Opposition' in Colombia: About the Bolivarian Movement," available from http://www.FARC-EPep.org/pagina_ingles/articles/illegality.html; Internet; accessed on 27 March 2005.

³⁷ Ferro Medina and Uribe Ramón, *El orden de la guerra*, 190.

³⁸ U.S Department of the Army, "Minor Third Parties," available from <http://countrystudies.us/colombia/88.htm>; Internet; accessed on 27 March 2005.

that there would be no new initiative for dealing with the guerrilla problem.³⁹ Although the Barco administration was able successfully to negotiate the demobilization of the M-19, one of Colombia's smaller yet extremely violent urban guerrilla organizations, little was accomplished in terms of securing a lasting peace agreement with the FARC-EP. The president's perceived lack of attention to the three year-old peace process with the guerrilla organization and his emphasis instead, under U.S. pressure, on narcotics and urban terrorism concerned many senior FARC-EP members, who began to clamor for an end to the ceasefire and a return to hostilities by early 1987. While this position was based on numerous factors at least three deserve to be highlighted.⁴⁰ First, the genocide committed against the UP and PCC allowed many senior guerrilla leaders to argue that the Colombian elites and "fascist military" would never allow a leftist political party to achieve real political power. The door to political reform, they insisted, had been closed, leaving the insurgency only an armed course of action to follow. Second, the Government of Colombia's unwillingness or inability to enact political reforms, a requirement that was stipulated in the Agreement of La Uribe as a precondition for continued participation in the cease fire, allowed many senior FARC-EP members to question the Government of Colombia's commitment to the political transformation of Colombian society. Third, the Colombian military's and paramilitaries' decisions to conduct counterinsurgency operations – in direct violation of the Agreement of La Uribe – against FARC-EP targets located in guerrilla held zones understood to be off-limits to the Colombian military, proved to many senior guerrilla leaders that the Colombian military was an out-of-control organization that ignored central governmental authority. These factors convinced many senior FARC-EP members to abandon the cease fire and to return to violent armed struggle.

However, these demands were tempered by more prudent voices which argued in favor of prolonging the cease fire in order to prepare FARC-EP combat units for an unavoidable return to hostilities. In the end, a compromise was reached between the two

³⁹ Harvey F. Kline, *State Building and Conflict Resolution in Colombia, 1986-1994* (Tucson: The University of Alabama Press, 1999), 33.

⁴⁰ The following three points are derived from FARC-EP, "Conclusiones Internas del Pleno Estado Mayor FARC-EP," *Historia de las FARC*, Unpublished FARC-EP Internal Document, 123.

factions. While the FARC-EP would continue to participate in the peace talks, it would also develop a secret “emergency plan” that would rapidly allow it to return to guerrilla war when the peace talks collapsed. In this manner, the cease fire served two functions. First, it bought the FARC-EP time to prepare for a return to guerrilla warfare. Second, it seemed to demonstrate that the insurgency was willing to dialogue with the government and seek a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The latter action was useful in acquiring additional political support from the populace as well as international support from interested third party nations.

But nearly four years of participating in the peace process and focusing its efforts on the development of a national political infrastructure had dulled the military edge of the FARC-EP. Senior military leaders within the insurgency found their combat units to be undisciplined, lethargic, and generally ineffective. Consequently, actions were taken during the Guerrilla Plenum of 25-29 December, 1987, to reorient the insurgency towards guerrilla warfare.⁴¹ Emphasis was once again placed on implementing the “new method of operating” – the FARC-EP’s new operating procedures for fielded combat guerrilla units which emphasized secrecy, mobility, surprise, and coordinated attacks against the Colombian military. Although the “new method of operating” had been adopted during the Seventh Guerrilla Conference of 1982, most FARC-EP units by late-1987 had failed to implement the new strategy and instead continued to rely upon ineffective guerrilla techniques that had been pioneered during the early 1970s. The inability of FARC-EP combat leaders to implement the “new method of operating” was attributed to a lack of training and doctrine. Consequently, the attendees to the Guerrilla Plenum of 25-29 December 1987 decided to remedy this problem by offering specialized military training courses at the FARC-EP’s Hernando González military academy located in los Llanos del Yarí, Caquetá.⁴²

But while the FARC-EP leadership endeavored psychologically and physically to prepare its combat forces for a return to war, it also sought to augment its clandestine

⁴¹ FARC-EP, “*Pleno Ampliado del Estado Mayor de las FARC-EP. Diciembre 25-29 de 1987. Primera Gran Conclusión*,” *Historia de las FARC*, Unpublished FARC-EP document, 154.

⁴² Pizarro Leongómez, *Una democracia asediada: Balance y perspectivas del conflicto armado en Colombia*, 96.

political apparatus and improve its relationship with “the masses.” This was accomplished by creating political discussion groups known as Bolivarian Town Meetings (*las Reuniones Bolivarianas del Pueblo*).⁴³ In these meetings, FARC-EP guerrillas clandestinely met with members of local communities in order to discuss items of political, social, and economic significance. The guerrillas also used these meetings to disseminate FARC-EP propaganda and to suggest political projects aimed at resolving local community problems. Above all, Bolivarian Town Meetings allowed the FARC-EP to establish and continuously improve its relationship with “the masses”. This, according to FARC-EP documents and Maoist guerrilla teachings, would be key in assuring the insurgency’s victory over the Colombian military.

3. The 1989 FARC-EP Plenum

By 1989, the senior leadership of the FARC-EP had decided that the time had come to abandon the peace process and return to guerrilla hostilities. As previously mentioned, this decision was based on the assessment that the ongoing peace talks with the Government of Colombia were not making any progress. Additionally, the FARC-EP felt that, although it had not taken maximum advantage of the cease fire to grow, develop its combat techniques, and territorially expand, further participation in the talks would simply weaken the organization and demoralize its troops. Consequently, at the organization’s 10-17 May, 1989, plenum, the guerrilla organization charted a course for all-out war against the Colombian military, which would be launched in January 1990.

Building upon the conclusions reached at the Seventh Guerrilla Conference, the FARC-EP developed and initiated an eight-year military plan, known as the Bolivarian Campaign for a New Colombia (*la Campaña Bolivariana por una Nueva Colombia*). This political-military strategy was divided into four phases, each of which was scheduled to last two years. In the first phase (1990-1992), the FARC-EP aspired to grow from a military force of approximately 5,000-8,000 guerrillas assigned to 44 fronts to a force of 18,000 distributed among 60 fronts.⁴⁴ Emphasis was placed on the acquisition of weapons, communications equipment, and even aircraft which were

⁴³ FARC-EP, “Pleno Ampliado del Estado Mayor de las FARC-EP. Diciembre 25-29 de 1987. Primera Gran Conclusión,” *Historia de las FARC*, Unpublished FARC-EP Internal Document, 153-154.

⁴⁴ FARC-EP, “Conclusiones Generales del Pleno del Estado Mayor de las FARC-EP. Mayo 10 – 17 de 1989,” *Historia de las FARC-EP*, Unpublished FARC-EP Internal Document, 179.

estimated to cost an approximately \$56 million dollars.⁴⁵ In the second phase (1992-1994), the FARC-EP hoped to grow to a total of 32,000 members dispersed among 80 fronts. An estimated US\$200 million dollars would be required to finance this portion of the organization's expansion.

In phase three (1994-1996), the FARC-EP would finally employ its “new method of operating” and, in accordance with the plans developed during the Seventh Guerrilla Conference, would launch its first major offensive against Bogotá and other select targets. The FARC-EP expected to employ half of its 32,000 guerrilla combatants or 16,000 troops as irregular guerrilla fighters. The remaining 16,000, however, would be employed according to the FARC-EP’s “new method of operating” to “...overrun military bases, civilian populations, and other objectives.”⁴⁶ This would require the intricate, coordinated movement of large-scale, near conventional strength, FARC-EP units operating across large swaths of territory against regular COLAR and CNP target sets. In phase three, irregular and “regular” guerrilla units would support one another in conducting joint attacks against preplanned targets.

These plans would later be carried out between 1996 and 1998 when the insurgency attacked, overran, and destroyed Las Delicias Military Base – a major Colombian military counternarcotics installation - captured the departmental capital of Mitú, Vaupés, attacked a military base located at Patascoy, Nariño department, and annihilated an elite counter-guerrilla unit – the 52nd Counter-guerrilla battalion, Third Mobile Brigade – located at El Billar, Caquetá.⁴⁷

Phase four (1996-1998), which was only to be executed if the offensive planned for phase three operations failed, called for all FARC-EP units to fall back to

⁴⁵ Colombian Army, “*Aplicación evolutiva de las FARC-EP*,” Unpublished Colombian Army Internal Document, May 2000, 9-11.

⁴⁶ FARC-EP, “*Líneas generales del Plan Militar Estratégico de Ocho Años, Julio 89-97*,” *Historia de las FARC*, Unpublished FARC-EP Internal Document, 180.

⁴⁷ *Fuerzas Militares para la Guerra: La agenda pendiente de la reforma militar*, by Alfredo Rangel Suárez, director (Bogotá: Fundación Seguridad y Democracia, 2003), 21-25. Additional information regarding these attacks and the FARC-EP’s employment of the “new method of operating” will be discussed in Chapter III.

predetermined positions in order to regroup and plan a second offensive. Additionally, urban guerrilla units such as the Solidarity Nuclei were charged with inciting the Colombian populace into carrying out mass-based general insurrections.

Two additional political-military organizations – the Bolivarian Militias and the Regular Militias - were created during the 10-17 May, 1989, plenum to assist the Solidarity Nuclei in mobilizing the populace. These organizations receive their orders directly from the *Estado Mayor Central* (EMC) and carry out specific missions that support both political and military objectives. The members of both groups are full-time civilians with normal civilian jobs that dedicate only a fraction of their time to activities in support of the FARC-EP.⁴⁸ The difference between Bolivarian militia members and regular Militia members is that Bolivarian militiamen are more politically indoctrinated than their regular militia counterparts. Additionally, Bolivarian militiamen dedicate some portion of the year to participating in rural-based combat operations while regular militiamen do not.

While the Solidarity Nuclei, Bolivarian Militias, and Regular Militias were mobilizing the urban populace, rural based FARC-EP combat units would splinter into smaller combat cells scattered throughout the country. These cells would then attack the Colombian military and force them to disperse into ever smaller units. This strategy was based on the principle of forcing the Colombian military to disperse over large areas of territory. Once this occurred, commando-size FARC-EP units would then regroup into larger guerrilla formations that would gradually attrit the geographically isolated Colombian military units.

In addition to standard guerrilla warfare, the FARC-EP also aspired in phase four operations to conduct terrorist attacks against the national infrastructure. Emphasis was to be placed upon paralyzing the national highway system, destroying electrical towers, and disrupting communications throughout the nation. These attacks against the national infrastructure would be designed to bring the country's economy to a grinding halt.

⁴⁸ Ferro Medina and Uribe Ramón, *El orden de la guerra*, 55-57.

Finally, once the FARC-EP had attrited Colombian military forces and encircled the capital, a general strike called by the FARC-EP would paralyze the nation. The FARC-EP forces in and around Bogotá would then take advantage of this strike to move their forces into the capital and overthrow the government. Upon defeating the Government of Colombia and removing the former leaders from power, a provisional revolutionary government would be established that would call for a plebiscite to write a new constitution. Upon the adoption of this new constitution, the FARC-EP would consider its revolution complete and would abandon its violent revolutionary struggle.

D. RESOURCES

The FARC-EP's 1982 decision to create a "little guerrilla army" required a significant shift in the organization's strategy for securing resources. Prior to 1982, the organization subsisted on those limited financial resources it could acquire through what Alfredo Rangel refers to as "predatory" activities - extortion, bank robberies, and random kidnappings.⁴⁹ However, the amount of revenue obtained from the organization's participation in these activities was insufficient to allow significant territorial or military gains, restricting numbers as well as the FARC-EP's firepower to those weapons the guerrillas could recover from the battlefield or steal from local peasants.⁵⁰

Marulanda rejected the possibility of materiel support from the former Soviet Union or Cuba, because he feared undue outside influence on the FARC-EP. FARC-EP commander Fernando Caicedo and Chief Political ideologue Iván Ríos insisted that, "but the Soviet Union never helped us out at all, because it occurred to someone in the FARC-EP, I don't know who it was...some say it was Manuel Marulanda, that we could not tie ourselves to the ideas of anyone else, even if they were revolutionaries...."⁵¹

The FARC-EP's decision to transform itself into an irregular guerrilla army drove the insurgency to develop an economic base of support that would allow the guerrilla organization to achieve its ambitious goals. Accordingly, following the Seventh

⁴⁹ Alfredo Rangel Suárez, "Parasites and Predators: Guerrillas and the Insurrection Economy of Colombia," *Journal of International Affairs* 53; no. 2 (Spring 2000): 582.

⁵⁰ Pizarro Leongómez, *Una democracia asediada: Balance y perspectivas del conflicto armado en Colombia*, 87.

⁵¹ Ferro Medina and Uribe Ramón, *El orden de la guerra*, 124.

Guerrilla Conference in 1982, the FARC-EP began to target and exploit four types of resources - livestock, commercial agriculture, oil, and gold – found in the resource-rich departments of Antioquia, Arauca, Meta, Caquetá, Magdalena, Córdoba, Santander, Bolívar, and Putumayo.⁵² In fact, the emergence of new FARC-EP fronts in the early-to-mid-1980s corresponded with those regions of the country undergoing an economic boom.⁵³ The money obtained from the extraction of these resources and their sale on the black market, as well as revenues obtained through the extortion of commercial business enterprises, allowed the FARC-EP to expand its political and military presence into new zones of guerrilla influence.

Another source of financial revenues derived from the FARC-EP’s increased involvement in the drug trade. Although many senior guerrilla leaders such as Jacobo Arenas, the FARC-EP’s former Marxist-Leninist political ideologue, ardently fought to prevent the organization from getting further involved in this “corrupting” and “counter-revolutionary” industry,⁵⁴ the financial requirements needed to support the development of the “little guerrilla army” eventually prevailed. Nevertheless, efforts were made in the 1980s to limit the FARC-EP’s involvement to protecting the *raspachines* (peasant farmers who cultivate and harvest coca leaves) and to charging narco-traffickers taxes to transport illicit drugs and related materials through guerrilla-held areas. However, by the 1990s, the FARC-EP’s involvement in the drug trade would greatly expand.

Although little information is known regarding the amount of revenues the FARC-EP earned during the 1980s from its participation in the drug trade and other illegal activities, it is widely recognized that these revenues fueled the growth and territorial expansion of the insurgency. Between 1982 and 1989 the FARC-EP grew to approximately 7,000 combatants assigned to 27 fronts – a 700% increase in guerrilla combatants in just seven years. This impressive growth is underscored when one

⁵² Camilo Echandía, “*Expansión territorial de las guerrillas colombianas*,” *Reconocer la guerra para construir la paz*, eds. Malcolm Deas and María Victoria Llorente (Bogotá: Cerec, Ediciones Uniandes, and Grupo Editorial Norma, 1999), 106-107.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Personal e-mail correspondence and subsequent telephone conversation with Dr. David Spencer on 12 January 2005.

considers that, in the first eighteen years of the insurgency's existence (1964-1982), the FARC-EP had barely been able to establish a guerrilla force composed of 1,000 combatants.

Despite this impressive growth, the FARC-EP's senior leadership was not satisfied with size of the “little guerrilla army.” Consequently, at the 10-17 May 1989 plenum, the organization's senior leadership ordered its subordinate units to make the acquisition and diversification of financial resources its number one priority. Transcripts from this plenum illustrate the preeminence given to achieving this objective:

The successful execution of the Bolivarian Campaign for a New Colombia will depend upon the correct interpretation and application of the FARC-EP's financial policies....It is necessary that we make a greater effort to explore new possibilities for obtaining greater financial resources. The increased acquisition of the aforementioned resources will assist us in improving our national political presence, the authority of the movement, and our relationship with the masses. Of equal importance is the attainment of financial resources derived from the mining industry – especially the gold, and oil industries. We should also look into the possibility of generating resources from the marble, platinum, and other mineral related industries. We need to study the feasibility of investing our money so as to create an economic base of support for the movement. We should continue to pursue all means available of acquiring international support.⁵⁵

This decision would have a major impact on the strategic behavior of the FARC-EP and would lay the foundation for the organization's dramatic growth and territorial expansion in the 1990s.

E. ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS

Throughout the 1980s, the FARC-EP implemented a series of internal structural changes designed to facilitate the organization's transformation into a guerrilla army and to guarantee that this process of expansion would not undermine the essential revolutionary character of the organization. First, in an effort to ready their fighters for the transition to maneuver warfare, several training and educational centers were founded. These guerrilla “academies” provided their students with political, ideological, and military training that would allow them to carry out operations directly in support of

⁵⁵ FARC-EP, “Conclusiones de Finanzas,” *Historia de las FARC*, Unpublished FARC-EP Internal Document, 189.

the Bolivarian Campaign for a New Colombia. Second, a number of changes were focused on establishing greater centralized control over the geographically dispersed FARC-EP fronts and their financial resources. These innovations, as well as the application of a stern penal code and the swift implementation of revolutionary justice, were designed to ensure that the FARC-EP’s increasing reliance on the drug trade for financing would serve, rather than jeopardize, the organization’s revolutionary aims. The combined efforts allowed the EMC to assert itself as the dominant political-military force within the FARC-EP and to consolidate its control over the burgeoning guerrilla organization.

1. FARC-EP Education, Institutions and Training Facilities

One of the first changes to be enacted was the creation in 1982 of the Hernando González School of Cadets (*la Escuela de Cadetes*). This guerrilla training center was established in order to introduce tactical-level commanders to the “new method of operating.”⁵⁶ Accordingly, the FARC-EP’s best and brightest guerrilla commanders traveled to the military academy, located in los Llanos del Yarí, Caquetá where emphasis was placed upon mobile guerrilla warfare, military psychology, urban guerrilla warfare, communications, first aid, cartography, artillery, and related topics.⁵⁷ Students also received political and ideological training and participated in seminars dealing with the FARC-EP’s Bolivarian Campaign for a New Colombia. Towards the end of the 1980s, the Hernando González military academy began to offer specialized courses in such subjects as the use of plastic explosives and intelligence gathering. It also produced a series of study guides or manuals that were freely distributed throughout the insurgent organization.

However, a shortage of classes and instructors prevented the FARC-EP from more rapidly implementing the “new method of operating.” FARC-EP documents speak of the need to increase the amount of classes offered throughout the year and to train more tactical-level commanders in the art of the “new method of operating.” Although

⁵⁶ FARC-EP, “Pleno Ampliado del Estado Mayor Central de las FARC-EP. Diciembre 27 de 1984 – Enero 2 de 1985. Conclusiones,” *Historia de las FARC*, Unpublished FARC-EP Internal Document, 83.

⁵⁷ FARC-EP, “Conclusiones sobre la Escuela Nacional,” *Historia de las FARC*, Unpublished FARC-EP Internal Document, 186.

the documents do not specifically state why these classes and training opportunities were offered on a limited basis, budget constraints as well as increased operations tempo may have played a role.

In addition to the *Escuela de Cadetes*, the FARC-EP also established regional training facilities for each section of the country. At those locations, new recruits completed their basic training and received introductory level classes in weapons familiarization, explosives, and tactical-level guerrilla warfare. According to one former member of the FARC-EP’s elite Teófilo Forero Mobile Column, alias Paola, basic training lasted four months and began with twenty, eight-hour long days, of political and ideological indoctrination.⁵⁸ Emphasis was also placed upon teaching the guerrilla recruits the FARC-EP’s penal code and the organization’s Statutes of Political Organization.

2. FARC-EP Control of Financial Resources

Beginning in 1982, FARC-EP fronts engaged in illicit activities in order to meet their annual financial contributions demanded by the organization’s highest political and military command authority – the EMC. However, the resource availability of a given geographic region determined the ability of the fronts to meet or exceed their financial obligations. In some resource poor sections of the country, FARC-EP fronts literally starved to death while their comrades, located in resource-rich sections of the country, enjoyed extravagant lifestyles.⁵⁹ According to FARC-EP internal documents, the leaders of some of the wealthier fronts, especially those that operated in the coca-rich departments of Putumayo and Caquetá, had reportedly adopted lifestyles approximating those of the local narco-traffickers. These “corrupted” and “bourgeois” members of the organization reportedly wore prominently displayed gold chains, bracelets, and toe rings

⁵⁸ Source: “Paola,” a former member of the Teófilo Forero Mobile Column with eight years of experience, interview by author, tape recording, Bogotá, Colombia, 22 September 2005.

⁵⁹ FARC-EP, “*Pleno Ampliado del Estado Mayor Central de las FARC-EP. Diciembre 27 de 1984 – Enero 2 de 1985. Conclusiones,*” *Historia de las FARC*, Unpublished FARC-EP Internal Document, 92.

while others were accused of purchasing expensive automobiles and other luxury items.⁶⁰ FARC-EP commander Julio Rincón commented on his time in command of a front based in Caquetá during the 1980s:

Narcotrafficking corrupted many within our command that's for sure...There are thousands of cases like this which took place in el Caguán (Caquetá). That's why my first decree was: no one will wear gold chains. Give me the chains and I'll send them to the Secretariat. All that gold from el Caguán was used to make medals, and military decorations honoring Isaías Pardo, one of our guerrilla fighters from the Marquetalia era. We don't wear any kind of gold; it was prohibited while I was there.⁶¹

While such activities were obviously forbidden within the FARC-EP, the decentralization of authority prevented the EMC from exerting control over its subordinate units. Consequently, the levels of corruption found within select fronts increased while loyalty to the revolutionary cause began to wane.

By 1985, the tremendous discrepancies noted between the rich and poor FARC-EP fronts had begun to create fissures within the guerrilla organization.⁶² Members of the poorer fronts resented the ostentatious and extravagant lifestyles of their economically richer comrades. Conversely, guerrilla fighters assigned to economically prosperous units began to refuse orders that would have redeployed them to resource-poor regions of the country. Additionally, rumors abounded regarding the theft of FARC-EP revenues, the misrepresentation of financial assets, and the general misappropriation and abuse of organizational assets.

In an effort to resolve these problems, the senior leadership of the insurgency met from 27 December 1984 – 2 January 1985 when they determined to centralize control of all FARC-EP finances in a newly created National Financial Commission. This entity reported directly to the EMC and was responsible for the allocation of all financial

⁶⁰ FARC-EP, “Informe Central al Pleno del Estado Mayor de las FARC-EP. Febrero 17-20 de 1987,” *Historia de las FARC*, Unpublished FARC-EP Internal Document, 116.

⁶¹ Ferro Medina and Uribe Ramón, *El orden de la guerra*, 61.

⁶² Ferro Medina and Uribe Ramón, *El orden de la guerra*, 107.

resources to the subordinate FARC-EP units. Additionally, this organization was granted authority to approve major purchases and determine overall financial policies for the guerrilla organization.

At the subordinate front levels, each FARC-EP element would be assigned a budget and provided with the means to accomplish its political and military objectives. Additionally, front-level Financial Commissions that operated independently of the political and military apparatuses of each guerrilla unit were established and required to account for all money spent by a given front. In this manner, the EMC hoped to both increase accountability and reduce the potential for corruption.

Later in 1987, after reports of corruption and graft persisted within the FARC-EP, the EMC announced the creation of *ayudantías* (advisors).⁶³ These individuals, who were specially selected by the EMC and assigned to each front, were given the responsibility for assuring that every front commander utilized allocated funds to accomplish the political and military objectives of their unit. *Ayudantías* provided political, military, and economic advice to the tactical-level unit commanders. Failure to use the financial allocations appropriated by the National Financial Commission in a “correct” manner resulted in the *ayudantía*’s referral of the local commander to the National Financial Commission for investigation and trial. Similar actions were taken if the *ayudantía* felt that the unit-level commander was failing to accomplish his assigned political and military objectives. If it was proven that the FARC-EP commander had stolen from the insurgency or misappropriated organizational funds, the insurgent leader, in accordance with the FARC-EP’s disciplinary or penal code known as the *Reglamento de Régimen Disciplinario*, was usually removed from his position of authority and immediately assassinated by a single shot to the head (*el tiro de gracia*).

The *Reglamento de Régimen Disciplinario* was also used to discipline rank and file guerrillas and to instill a strict sense of military discipline firmly rooted in fear.⁶⁴

⁶³ FARC-EP, “Conclusiones de Finanzas del Pleno Ampliado del Comité Ejecutivo. Febrero 18 de 1987,” *Historia de las FARC*, Unpublished FARC-EP Internal Document, 129.

⁶⁴ Note: For a more detailed study of the FARC-EP’s penal code see Juan Guillermo Ferro Medina and Graciela Uribe Ramón, *El orden de la guerra*, 57-59 and Human Rights Watch, *You’ll Learn Not to Cry: Child Combatants in Colombia* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2003), 68-74.

This code, which all guerrilla members are required to study closely, was created during the FARC-EP’s second guerrilla conference held from 25 April – 5 May 1966 and prescribes a variety of political and/or military punishments ranging from public self-criticism to execution. Of note, Article three of the penal code prescribes an immediate death sentence for those convicted of desertion, betrayal, fomenting rebellion and fractionalization, rape, theft, establishing businesses, and drug abuse.⁶⁵ By swiftly implementing the punishments, the FARC-EP was able to root out discipline problems, encourage *les autres*, and regain control over subordinate units.

Guerrillas accused of serious crimes were placed on trial in what is referred to as a “war council.” During these trials, the accused guerrilla member was judged by a panel composed of his fellow guerrillas. While the individual on trial was appointed an “attorney” to defend him – usually the accused’s greatest enemy - generally speaking, “war councils” almost always found the accused guilty and sentenced the convicted guerrilla to death. This sentence was then carried out by the convicted guerrilla’s closest friend who, if unable to enforce the punishment, was also immediately executed. In this manner, the FARC-EP utilized fear to maintain discipline and order within the organization.

Finally, in an effort further to centralize its authority over the subordinate FARC-EP units and their members, the guerrilla organization reinforced collectivization of all property. All goods which entered the FARC-EP – even seemingly innocuous items such as birthday gifts – had to be surrendered to the local FARC-EP commander.⁶⁶ This individual was then responsible for remitting such property to the local Financial Commission, which in turn forwarded it to the National Financial Commission. The latter entity then determined how the property would be used within the guerrilla insurgency.

⁶⁵ Personal correspondence received from retired Colombian senior-military officer with more than thirty years of experience regarding the FARC-EP. Information received on 30 March 2005.

⁶⁶ Ferro Medina and Uribe Ramón, *El orden de la guerra*, 104-105.

The FARC-EP’s decision to centralize finances, create institutions responsible for the management of financial assets, and establish a common yearly budget from which each FARC-EP unit derived its financial allotments, resulted in the reduction of tensions among FARC-EP units and an improvement in organizational cohesion.

F. CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has argued that the 1980s represented a key turning point in the historical evolution of the FARC-EP. During this decade, the organization made great strides in developing a coherent strategy that would guide its growth and territorial expansion during the 1990s. The FARC-EP also made efforts to consolidate its control over its subordinate units and to centralize its authority in the EMC. These actions were taken to prevent the formation of fissures within the organization and to ensure the senior-leadership’s tight control of the insurgency. Major purges were also conducted to remove undesirable, “bourgeois,” or “counterrevolutionary” elements and to ensure that only “true revolutionaries” remained in the ranks of the FARC-EP.

The 1980s were significant in that, for the first time in the history of the FARC-EP, the insurgency developed and acted upon a strategic plan for achieving revolutionary political power. This plan, whose realization depended upon the acquisition of revenues obtained through the organization’s participation in the illicit drug trade, would drive the actions of the FARC-EP for the next twenty years and enable it to come within striking distance of achieving national power.

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III. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE “BOLIVARIAN CAMPAIGN FOR A NEW COLOMBIA” (1990-1998)

The FARC-EP apply the fundamental principles of Marxist-Leninism to the Colombian reality and are guided by the movement’s Strategic Plan and Revolutionary Program, the conclusions of its national conferences, the Plenums of the *Estado Mayor Central*, and its Internal Regulations. It is inspired by the revolutionary thoughts of the Liberator, Simón Bolívar, anti-imperialism, Latin American unity, equality, and the well-being of the people. The FARC -EP advocate the creation of an authentic Bolivarian Army.⁶⁷

The Statutes of the FARC-EP, Chapter One, Article Two

A. INTRODUCTION

At the dawn of the 1990s, the FARC-EP was positioned to take its next revolutionary step forward. Armed with a comprehensive strategic plan – the Bolivarian Campaign for a New Colombia - developed during the 1980s and financed largely through its involvement in the drug trade, the movement was eager to take the war to the Colombian military. The 1990s would witness the successful execution of the guerrilla organization’s strategic plan. By 1996, the FARC-EP’s victories against the Colombian military would become so definitive that many domestic and foreign observers would predict the imminent fall of the central government.⁶⁸

Some observers have suggested that the 1990s marked the decade in which the FARC-EP completely abandoned its revolutionary cause and devolved into a criminal enterprise. They cite the FARC-EP’s growing involvement in the drug trade and reported multi-million dollar yearly income as evidence of the organization’s devolution into a criminal enterprise. By the beginning of the 1990s, this argument goes, the FARC-EP was no longer driven by revolutionary ambitions, but rather by an unquenchable thirst for greater revenues. It sought, as one critic has argued, to fill the void left by the demise of

⁶⁷ All translations from the Spanish are the authors unless otherwise indicated.

⁶⁸ *Fuerzas Militares para la Guerra: La agenda pendiente de la reforma militar*, by Alfredo Rangel Suárez, director (Bogotá: Fundación Seguridad y Democracia, 2003), 26.

the Medellín and Cali cartels and to become the nation’s “third cartel.”⁶⁹ This chapter refutes these arguments by examining the political-military, financial, and organizational development of the FARC-EP in the 1990s. It illustrates that, despite the guerrilla organization’s greater involvement in the drug trade, the movement did not descend into criminality, but rather remained a revolutionary organization focused on achieving political power “through the barrel of a gun.”

Between 1990 and 1998, the FARC-EP registered impressive military accomplishments, actions that obeyed a political-military logic aimed at achieving the strategic objectives set forth in the Bolivarian Campaign for a New Colombia. Throughout the 1990s, the FARC-EP carried out numerous offensives and attacked high-value, strategic targets in an effort to sabotage the national economy, diminish the legitimacy of the state, and bring about the “necessary conditions” that would lead to a general insurrection. To accomplish these objectives, the insurgency transitioned from guerrilla to maneuver warfare and implemented new tactics and techniques associated with the “new method of operating.” It also organized a new political party - the Colombian Clandestine Communist Party (PCCC) – as a successor to the Patriotic Union (UP) and launched a grassroots, movement known as the Bolivarian Movement for a New Colombia. Finally, in an effort to secure its control over the organization’s primary cash crop – coca – and to establish strategic dominance over a geo-strategically important region, the FARC-EP made a push into Southern Colombia. By dominating this area of the country, the guerrilla organization would ensure a constant supply of weapons and war materiel from neighboring Ecuador while at the same time assuring the movement of coca into and out of the region.

Similarly, in an effort to achieve its ambitious political-military objectives the FARC-EP underwent the most radical internal reorganization in the movement’s thirty year history. More battle-proven and militant leaders, such as Jorge Briceño Suárez, alias el Mono Jojoy, were appointed to the movement’s senior positions. Tighter political controls were implemented as the guerrilla organization was becoming immersed in the

⁶⁹ See William W. Mendel, “Colombia’s Threat to Regional Security,” *Military Review* (May-June 2001): 3.

drug trade, so that illicit activities did not alter its revolutionary character or splinter the cohesion of the insurgency. This was due to the leadership's stern enforcement of its draconian penal code –*el Reglamento de Régimen Disciplinario*.

Finally, in an effort to increase its financial reserves the FARC-EP expanded into regions of the country where Colombia's latest illicit crop – poppy – was grown. The FARC-EP would also take advantage of the liberal reforms of the Constitution of 1991, which devolved political power to the departmental and municipal levels, to force local politicians to grant the organization access to departmental and municipal revenues. The funds acquired through the organization's participation in the illicit drug trade, extortion of private and public entities, and other illegal activities, allowed the movement to purchase the supplies, communications equipment, and war materiel necessary for prosecuting its war against the central government.

B. POLITICAL-MILITARY

The FARC-EP's decision to abandon the legitimate political process and to seek a military resolution to the thirty year-old conflict was influenced by its perception that the Government of Colombia would never grant it a significant role in national politics. Consequently, the FARC-EP sought to obtain through violence what it could not attain through peaceful participation in the country's electoral contest. The large-scale FARC-EP offensives of the 1990s against the presidential administrations of César Gaviria Trujillo (1990-1994) and Ernesto Samper (1994-1998) as well as the creation of the clandestine political movement, the Bolivarian Movement for a New Colombia, were carried out in an effort to weaken the state and discredit the Colombian military. Furthermore, the insurgency's push into coca-rich Southern Colombia and strategic reprioritization of this area was driven at least as much by military objectives as by the desire to earn drug money. The revenues earned from participation in this illicit industry were then used to support the growth and territorial extension of the "little guerrilla army." The launching of maneuver warfare against the Samper administration resulted from the combination of a long-in-the-making shift to the "new method of operating" and the determination that the FARC-EP should exploit a weak and internationally discredited presidential administration.

The fact that the FARC-EP’s large-scale guerrilla offensives and attacks against the national infrastructure coincided with its immersion in the drug trade illustrate that the organization acted with revolutionary and not criminal intent. If the FARC-EP were a criminal organization, primarily interested in profiting from the drug trade, it would have adopted a low profile and sought to avoid contact with the state (unless the state initiated the offensive). However, the FARC-EP initiated large-scale attacks and offensives against non-drug related targets including military bases, departmental capitals, and the national infrastructure. These and other examples illustrate that the FARC-EP’s political-military actions of the 1990s obeyed a political and not a criminal logic focused on the attainment of revolutionary power.

In accordance with the decisions reached at the FARC-EP’s 1989 guerrilla plenum, the senior leadership of the insurgency in January 1990 directed its subordinate units temporarily to abandon its efforts to achieve revolutionary power via the ballot box in favor of a more direct, violent, military course of action. Following the senior leadership’s guidance, subordinate FARC-EP units were ordered to implement the Bolivarian Campaign for a New Colombia. Although at first the senior leadership’s decision to abandon the electoral politics process in favor of a primarily military strategy was somewhat controversial, four subsequent events in mid-to-late 1990 would vindicate this decision.⁷⁰

First, on 10 August 1990, Jacobo Arenas, the FARC-EP’s political ideologue died of a heart attack. Arenas’s death was significant in that, had he lived, it is unlikely that the FARC-EP would have completely abandoned its involvement in the nation’s political process. This political ideologue was a staunch supporter of “the combination of all forms of struggle” – a guerrilla strategy in which insurgent activity in the political, economic, social, and military spheres combine to pressure the government into making political concessions in favor of the insurgents. Arenas would have argued that

⁷⁰ Although the FARC-EP ceased to participate in the *legitimate political process*, it would later launch a clandestine political movement in 1996 known as the Bolivarian Movement for a New Colombia. This will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

abandoning the political avenue to power reduced the effectiveness of the insurgency and constrained its options. He, therefore, would have fought to prevent the FARC-EP from forsaking its participation in the political process in favor of a purely military strategy.

A second factor which strengthened the militarization of FARC-EP strategy was the continued assassination of members of the guerrilla organization's political party, the Patriotic Union (UP). Between 1985 and mid-1988, 550 members of the UP, including 1986 presidential candidate Jaime Pardo Leal and four UP congressmen, were murdered.⁷¹ By 1995, this number would grow to 2,500 before reaching a grand total of 4,000.⁷² As Juan Guillermo Ferro Medina and Graciela Uribe Ramón observe, "...the extermination of the Patriotic Union signified for the FARC the closing of the legal democratic window; in other words, the abandonment of the legal political work carried out by movements that participate in the electoral contest."⁷³ The FARC-EP's tie to the nation's legitimate political process would be severed in the early 1990s when the UP, in favor of finding a negotiated political settlement to the internal conflict, abandoned the movement. This left the guerrilla organization unrepresented in the nation's political system.

A third factor which increased FARC-EP support for a military solution to the conflict was then President César Gaviria Trujillo's refusal to allow the insurgency to participate in the 9 December, 1990, elections for the Constituent Assembly which was to draw up Colombia's first new constitution since 1886. Gaviria's decision was based upon two factors. First, the FARC-EP refused to comply with the President's demand that all guerrilla organizations wishing to participate in the Constituent Assembly lay down their weapons and demobilize. Having seen the fate that met the members of the UP, the FARC-EP did not trust the government to protect their members and reserved the right to retain weapons to guarantee their safety. Second, the FARC-EP in coordination with the Army of National Liberation (ELN), another guerrilla insurgency that refused to

⁷¹ U.S. Department of the Army, "Minor Third Parties," available from <http://countrystudies.us/colombia/88.htm>; Internet, accessed on 27 March 2005

⁷² Geoff Simons, *Colombia: A Brutal History* (London: Saqi Books, 2004), 96.

⁷³ Ferro Medina and Uribe Ramón, *El orden de la guerra* (Bogotá: Centro Editorial Javeriano, 2002), 116.

demobilize, had carried out military offensives during the autumn of 1990 that were designed to pressure the government to back down on its for demobilization. President Gaviria, however, was unmoved by the attacks and successfully urged the National Congress to prohibit the participation of the FARC-EP and the ELN in the elections.

But the incident which confirmed the validity of the senior leadership's decision to declare all-out war on the government was the Colombian military's autonomous decision to bomb La Casa Verde – the former headquarters of the FARC-EP located in la Uribe, Meta department. This attack, code named operation *Centauro*, took place on the same day, 9 December 1990, that Colombian voters elected the 70 delegates who would write the nation's new constitution. The destruction of La Casa Verde would have long-term implications for the FARC-EP, the Government of Colombia, and the Colombian military. According to Raúl Reyes, head of the FARC-EP's international commission:

After that operation [*Centauro*] the guerrilla struggle became stronger because people became more willing to participate in combat, they became more experienced, and there were a few, who, perhaps due to the gravity of the operation asked to be reassigned to combat units. But there were others who, to the contrary, gained greater experience. More people joined the FARC. After the attack on La Casa Verde, the military structure of the FARC grew like never before. However, at that moment, few critically evaluated the cost that President Gaviria's act of war would have on the country.⁷⁴

Immediately following the destruction of La Casa Verde, supreme FARC-EP commander, Manuel Marulanda Vélez, stated, "We understand by this action that the government of Gaviria is closing the possibility of a negotiated settlement, and that he and he alone must assume the full responsibility for the consequences."⁷⁵

1. Operation Wasp: The First FARC-EP Offensive (1990-1991)

On 31 December 1990, three weeks after the Colombian military's razing of La Casa Verde, the FARC-EP and ELN initiated the largest guerrilla offensive in the history of the nation. Code named "Operation Wasp," this offensive was conducted in response to the destruction of the La Casa Verde and the Government's refusal to allow the FARC-

⁷⁴ Ferro Medina and Uribe Ramón, *El orden de la guerra*, 116-117.

⁷⁵ Douglas Farah, "Bogota Attacks Redoubt Of Leftist Rebel Forces; Revolutionaries Say Target Is Peace Talks," *The Washington Post*, 14 December 1990, sec. A38; ProQuest, accession no. 72635788.

EP and the ELN to participate in the constituent assembly. Within the first forty-eight hours of the offensive, the guerrilla organizations killed about 130 people and wounded an additional 200.⁷⁶ Subsequent attacks carried out during the months of January – February 1991, in accordance with the strategic guidance provided in the Bolivarian Campaign for a New Colombia, focused on destroying the nation's economic infrastructure by dynamiting natural gas and oil pipelines that crisscross the country. Colombian National Police and military personnel were also attacked while transportation and communication facilities were damaged. By early February 1991, the joint FARC-EP and ELN offensive had resulted in the deaths of 250 guerrillas, government troops, and civilians and had cost the Government of Colombia more than \$100 million dollars in lost oil revenues.⁷⁷

The guerrilla offensive against the Government of Colombia continued throughout the winter and was punctuated by the decision of the FARC-EP and ELN to launch a second offensive on 7 February, 1991. The date of the second joint offensive was set to coincide with, and protest, the convocation of the Constituent Assembly. During this second offensive, the FARC-EP and ELN continued to attack oil pipelines, spilling more than 38,000 barrels of crude oil in the first 40 days of 1991. A representative from ECOPETROL, the state oil corporation, highlighted the impact of the guerrillas' attacks against the pipelines when he stated that between 1986 – the first year in which such an attack occurred – and February 1991, more than 650,000 barrels of crude oil had been spilled into Colombia's fragile ecosystem. This number is two and a half times the amount of oil – approximately 260,000 barrels – that was spilled into Prince William Sound, Alaska by the Exxon Valdez oil tanker on 24 March 1989.⁷⁸

By the time President Gaviria would leave office in August 1994, the guerrillas' violent actions would cost the nation 12.5 billion pesos in lost revenues – “some 22.7

⁷⁶ “130 die, 200 injured in (sic) new year eve in Colombia,” *The Xinhua General Overseas News Service*, 2 January 1991, 5, Lexis Nexis, accession no. 0102025.

⁷⁷ Stan Yarbro, “Guerrillas Step Up Attacks in Colombia Violence: The Rebel Groups, Excluded from the Constitutional Debate, are Spreading Terror in the Capital. The Death Toll Has Reached 47,” *Los Angeles Times*, 7 February 1991, 21, ProQuest, accession no. 61043337.

⁷⁸ Douglas Farah, “Car Bomb Kills 19, Injures 60 Outside Medellín Bull Arena,” *The Washington Post*, 17 February 1991, sec. A-.25, ProQuest, accession no. 72069552.

percent of the value of production in 1995, and close to the balance of the national public foreign debt.”⁷⁹ Additionally, the political violence that would shake the country between 1990 and 1994 would result in the deaths of 3,400 people annually and cost the government 2.5 billion pesos in lost revenues each year. The guerrillas’ violent actions would also cost the private sector 1.4 billion pesos, including more than 800 million as a result of kidnappings, extortion, and robberies. Similarly, increased defense spending, additional security for the petroleum sector, and royalties lost as a result of attacks on the hydrocarbon network would cost the public sector approximately four billion pesos between 1990 and 1994.⁸⁰ This inflicting of costs was part of the FARC-EP’s strategy for provoking the economic ruin of the country.

The FARC-EP’s attacks against the national infrastructure and related targets would increase after President Gaviria, in reaction to a surge in violence attributed to the guerrillas and the Medellín cartel, announced a change in the country’s national defense policy. Instead of planning and preparing for a war with neighboring Venezuela, Gaviria ordered the Colombian military to refocus its efforts on strengthening internal security.⁸¹ The president, having declared a state of siege, then decreed the implementation of a “war tax” on 11 February 1991. The revenues obtained from this tax would be used to equip the military with the necessary tools required “to counter violence.” The military would later use the funds obtained via the war tax to improve the intelligence gathering capabilities of the armed forces, create two new mobile brigades totaling 1,500 soldiers, and establish patrol companies charged with protecting pipelines, oil fields, and mines. This new military strategy became known as the National Strategy against Violence (la Estrategia Nacional contra la Violencia).⁸²

The FARC-EP viewed the Government’s new national security doctrine, strengthening of the military and anti-guerrilla political rhetoric as a declaration of war against the insurgency. After years of perennial neglect, the guerrilla organization had

⁷⁹ “Economic Costs of Insurgency Studied, “*El Espectador* (Bogotá), 27 December 1995, sec. 1B, FBIS, accession no. FTS19951227000075.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Harvey F. Kline, *State Building and Conflict Resolution in Colombia, 1986-1994* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1999), 86.

⁸² Alfredo Rangel, *Guerra Insurgente* (Bogotá: Intermedio Editores, 2001), 364-365.

become accustomed to being placed last on the list of the government's priorities. Therefore, President Gaviria's announcement to take the war to the FARC-EP caught the insurgency somewhat by surprise.

2. The Peace Talks of 1991-1992

Realizing that it was not yet in a position to challenge the Colombian military, the insurgency, along with the ELN and the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), entered into peace talks with the Government. From June 1991 until October 1992, the three insurgencies, operating under an umbrella organization known as the Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordinator (CGSB for its acronym in Spanish), met with representatives from the central government first in Caracas, Venezuela and then in Tlaxcala, Mexico.⁸³ However, this round of peace talks with the Government would be different from those conducted during the 1980s in several ways. First, the FARC-EP and its sister guerrilla organizations entered the peace process without the intention of making any concessions to the government. In fact, the purpose of the peace talks, from the FARC-EP's perspective, was to capitalize upon the presence of the national and international media in order to show the strength of the insurgency and the relative weakness of the central government. This was accomplished by conducting the peace talks without the imposition of a cease fire. Such conditions allowed the FARC-EP and its fellow guerrilla organizations to conduct joint military offensives against the Colombian military and the civilian populace. In this manner, the FARC-EP, the ELN, and the EPL always arrived at the peace table with a military advantage.⁸⁴ Second, from the very outset the peace talks of 1991-1992 showed little promise of achieving a negotiated settlement to the conflict. Representatives from both the Government and the CGSB could not even agree on a procedural format in which to carry out the negotiations. This would only worsen with the passage of time and would culminate with the inability of the government and the CGSB to agree upon topics to be discussed at subsequent meetings. The 1991-1992 peace talks would ultimately fail due to belligerent actions which were committed in Colombia, but whose effects transcended international borders. The kidnapping and

⁸³ For an in-depth study of the failed peace process of 1991-1992 see Kline, *State Building and Conflict Resolution in Colombia, 1986-1994*, 87-118.

⁸⁴ Kline, *State Building and Conflict Resolution in Colombia, 1986-1994*, 89, 98, 106.

subsequent death in captivity of influential politician Argelino Durán Quintero would eventually move President Gaviria to break off peace talks with the CGSB. Despite the FARC-EP's warning that "there will be total war" if the government did not return to the peace table, President Gaviria turned his back on the peace process and instead decided militarily to "win" the war.⁸⁵

3. The Eighth Guerrilla Conference: Maneuver Warfare and the Push into the South

Following the failed peace talks and the government's repeated indications that it intended to pursue a military victory, the senior leadership of the FARC-EP met from 11-18 April 1993 in a remote area of the Guaviare department. There, the guerrillas held the FARC-EP's Eighth Guerrilla Conference. Most of the decisions reached at this conference dealt with changes that affected the internal structure and organizational dynamics of the guerrilla organization and will be discussed in great detail later in the chapter. In addition, the senior leadership planned for the political future of the insurgency and readjusted its military strategy and tactics in preparation for its transition to maneuver warfare.

In order to prepare itself for the organization's presumed ascendance to political power, the FARC-EP announced a plan to provide for the academic training and preparation of an elite group of guerrillas. These individuals, sometimes referred to as "the one hundred wise men" or "*los cien sabios*" in Spanish, were individually selected by the Secretariat and sent abroad to receive advanced university degrees in a variety of academic subjects. In this manner, the FARC-EP created a group of highly trained and competent government bureaucrats who, the guerrillas hoped, would one day emerge from obscurity to become the nation's new political leaders.⁸⁶

In terms of military adjustments, the FARC-EP implemented the long heralded "new method of operating" and ordered the strategic reprioritization of southern Colombia.

⁸⁵ Kline, State Building and Conflict Resolution in Colombia, 1986-1994, 107.

⁸⁶ Interview with alias Paola, a former member of the FARC-EP's Teófilo Forero Mobile Column, interview by author, tape recording, Bogotá, Colombia, 20 September 2005. Note: Two members of the Colombian military (identities withheld by request) later substantiated Paola's comments.

In the Eighth Guerrilla Conference, the FARC-EP made a qualitative jump with regards to military affairs, noted FARC-EP commander Fernando Caicedo. The traditional scheme of guerrilla warfare came to an end, the capability to attack en masse and destroy the enemy and later successfully retreat was developed. All of this occurred within the concept referred to as the “new method of operating” which means: besiege, attack, overwhelm, and retreat. This type of warfare, in terms of military strategy, would be referred to as maneuver warfare, but guerrilla style.⁸⁷

The implementation of the “new method of operating” signified, in Maoist terms, a move from the first defensive phase of Revolutionary Warfare, to the second “War of Movement” phase. In the latter, large-scale guerrilla columns generally consisting of hundreds of armed combatants are employed against military targets in what in essence constitutes a war of positions. Independent guerrilla elements support the columns by conducting hit-and-run attacks against the enemy. The simultaneous application of regular and irregular guerrilla forces is designed to confuse the enemy and catch him off balance. If executed correctly, the combination of attacks will disorient the enemy and cause him to think that he is surrounded, thus allowing the insurgent force to overwhelm and destroy the besieged military unit.⁸⁸ The “new method of operating” was to be used for “...seizing military bases, civilian populations, and other objectives.”⁸⁹ Unfortunately for the Colombian Government, the FARC-EP would apply these tactics with devastating success.

In addition to implementing the “new method of operating,” the senior leadership decided to place greater emphasis on the territorial control and domination of southern Colombia. This decision has at least three explanations. First, the senior-leadership, recognizing the vast wealth of opportunity present in the coca-rich departments of Putumayo, Caquetá, and Guaviare, ordered its fronts to step up their efforts to increase FARC-EP colonization of those areas. In this manner, the FARC-EP hoped to secure its control over those lands where geographic and climatic conditions favored the planting

⁸⁷ Juan Guillermo Ferro Medina and Graciela Uribe Ramón, *El orden de la guerra*, 117.

⁸⁸ For additional information on maneuver warfare see Ernesto “Ché” Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*. Translated by Marc Becker (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 155-156. Another source which provides examples of maneuver warfare in practice is David Nolan, *The Ideology of the Sandinistas and the Nicaraguan Revolution*, 2d ed. (Coral Gables: University of Miami, 1985), 99-100.

⁸⁹ FARC-EP, “Líneas generales del Plan Militar Estratégico de Ocho Años, Julio 89-97,” *Historia de las FARC*, Unpublished FARC-EP Internal Document, 180.

and cultivation of the organization's number one cash crop – coca. Revenues derived from the organization's increased participation in the drug trade would then be used to fuel the growth and territorial expansion of the "little guerrilla army." But financial considerations were not the only reason why the FARC-EP's attention was drawn to the south. Access to the 630-km long porous border with Ecuador was also of great interest to the insurgency.

Historically, numerous Colombian guerrillas of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had escaped from the Colombian military or from rival factions by crossing the international border into Ecuador. After years of constant exposure to the "invading" Colombian guerrillas, a border culture, based upon familial ties between Colombian guerrillas and northern Ecuadorian peasants, had developed.⁹⁰ The senior-leadership of the FARC-EP hoped to exploit these relationships in order to create a logistical supply line that would funnel war materiel from Ecuador to Colombia.⁹¹ In this manner, the small Andean nation to the south would become a supply depot and logistical chain of support for the guerrilla organization.

Finally, the FARC-EP emphasized controlling the southern portion of the country because of the strategic location of the departments of Caquetá, Guaviare, and Guainía. By exercising control over these departments, the FARC-EP would be able to utilize the hundreds of rivers and streams which flow through those areas as veritable highways. [See Figure 2.] In this manner, supplies originating in Ecuador could travel north to Putumayo where they would be placed on river boats and shipped east to the departments of Guaviare, Vichada, and Guainía. Similarly, guerrillas operating in the eastern plains of the country could use the rivers to travel to the southern or southwestern portions of the country. This would prove key in augmenting fielded combat forces under attack in either the southern or eastern sections of the country. For these and other reasons, the FARC-EP considered territorial control of southern Colombia essential to the successful realization of its strategic plan.

90 Judith A. Gentleman, *The Regional Security Crisis in the Andes: Patterns of State Response* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2001), 5.

91 Sandra Edwards, *Colombian Conflict Impacts Ecuador*, 4, available from http://www.wola.org/publications/ddhr_ecuador_memo1.pdf; Internet; accessed on 5 February 2005.

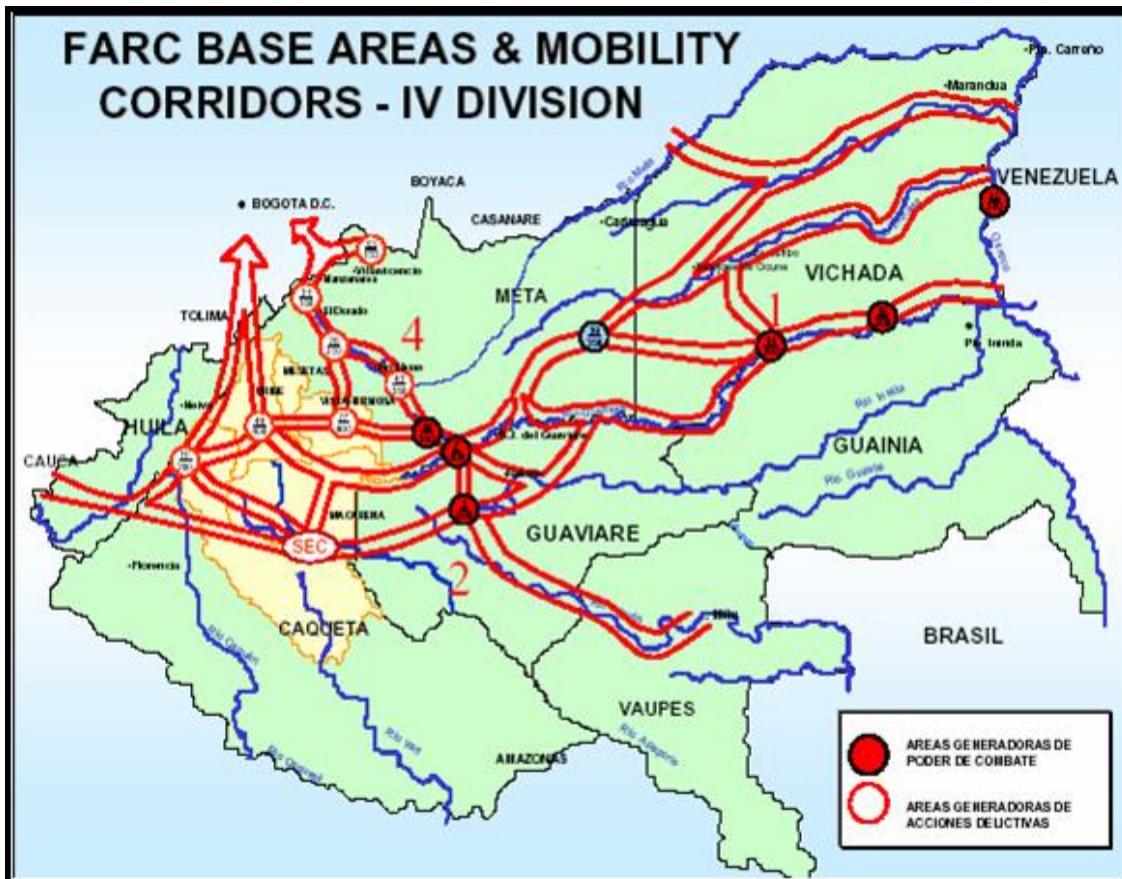


Figure 2. Illustration of Strategic and Mobility Corridors Linking Eastern and Southern Colombia⁹²

4. Major Victories against the Samper Administration (1994-1998)

The inauguration of Ernesto Samper as the nation's eighty-second president on 7 August 1994 did not diminish the FARC-EP's demands for radical and revolutionary change. Elected on a platform which differed slightly from that of his competitor, Conservative Party member Andrés Pastrana, Samper favored continued peace talks with the guerrillas and increased investment in those regions where there was support for the rebels.⁹³ However, Pastrana's allegation that Samper had accepted campaign donations from the Cali cartel would haunt the president for the duration of his time in office and nearly cost him the presidency. By the time he would leave office in 1998, many

⁹² Marks, "Colombian Army Counterinsurgency," 18.

⁹³ Simons, Colombia: A Brutal History, 93.

members of his original cabinet, including Vice President Humberto De la Calle and Minister of Defense Fernando Botero, would resign either in protest or as a consequence of the President's alleged connections to the narco-trafficking enterprise.

International relations between the United States and Colombia were also damaged by the scandal, culminating in the U.S. decertification of Colombia in 1996 and 1997. Additionally, the drastic reduction in coca cultivation in Peru and Bolivia, as a result of massive spray and manual eradication efforts in those countries and a fall in coca prices linked to the interdiction of aircraft ferrying coca leaf to traffickers in Colombia, forced narco-traffickers to find a new environment suitable for cultivating the illegal cash crop. The lawless areas of southern and southeastern Colombia proved to be ideal locations. As a result, coca cultivated areas increased by 66% from a total of 67,200 hectares in 1996 to 101,800 hectares in 1998.⁹⁴

The FARC-EP took advantage of Samper's political isolation and the apparent weakness of the Colombian state to indicate its willingness to dialogue with the government. However, this time the organization preconditioned its participation in future peace talks on the complete demilitarization of the municipality where the guerrilla organization's former headquarters, La Casa Verde, had been located – La Uribe, Meta department.⁹⁵ Although President Samper at first indicated his willingness to cede this territory temporarily to the FARC-EP, the Colombian military later pressured the President to deny this request. Consequently the guerrilla organization and the government did not hold peace talks during the Samper administration.

In April 1996, the FARC-EP made an unexpected move and launched a new political movement known as the Bolivarian Movement for a New Colombia. This political movement and its associated political party, the Colombian Clandestine Communist Party (PCCC), were created to replace the defunct Patriotic Union and to rally public support in favor of the insurgency. According to the PCCC's founder,

94 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Colombia Coca Cultivation Survey," 7, available from http://www.unodc.org/pdf/colombia/colombia_coca_survey_2003.pdf; Internet; accessed on 6 May 2005.

95 "FARC Sends President Proposal to Start Peace Talks," *EFE* (Madrid), FBIS, accession no. FTS19950517000273 and "President Presents Peace Proposal to Guerrilla Groups," Santa Fé de Bogotá Inravisión Televisión Canal A Network, FBIS, accession no. FTS19950519000261.

FARC-EP military strategist and member of the Secretariat, Jorge Briceño Suárez, the Bolivarian Movement for a New Colombia was to be a clandestine political movement made up of members, or “militants”, drawn from all social classes and walks of life. The PCCC’s members would “...create a platform of political opposition different from those of the traditional parties, capable of contributing with efficacy to the conveyance of the country towards destinies of equality and national sovereignty.”⁹⁶ The Colombian Communist Clandestine Party advocated the creation of a socialist state founded in part on a liberal interpretation of Marxist-Leninism and “national democratic and revolutionary experiences.” It also expressed a strong anti-imperialist agenda, rejected neo-liberalist economic policies, and sought to realize the Bolivarian dream – the unification of Latin America – by cooperating with other revolutionary groups active throughout the Western Hemisphere. The movement also espoused the creation of a “Government of Reconstruction and National Reconciliation” based on ten points contained within the movement’s charter. Collective decision-making and self-criticism, two principles which today continue to characterize FARC-EP behavior, were also implemented within the movement.⁹⁷

The launching of the Bolivarian Movement for a New Colombia and the PCCC were significant in that they illustrate that the FARC-EP had not lost touch with its ultimate political *rason d'être*. In fact, the guerrilla organization, although committed at this moment in time to obtaining political power through violence, recognized the importance of articulating a political platform by which it could disseminate its beliefs and acquire new adherents to its cause. The creation of this movement and the PCCC, immediately preceding the initiation of several large-scale guerrilla offensives, illustrates the forward thinking of the guerrilla organization and its expectation quickly to acquire control over new territories and their associated populations. It is likely that the FARC-EP created this movement so as to consolidate political-military control over the populations that it would conquer in the subsequent guerrilla offensives of 1996-1998.

⁹⁶ Colombian military, “*Apreciación evolutiva de las FARC*,” Unpublished Colombian military Internal Document, May 2000, 17.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 17-21.

On 30 August 1996, in what would become a string of decisive victories for the insurgency, the FARC-EP attacked and overran a small company of 120 soldiers assigned to Las Delicias counternarcotics base located in Putumayo.⁹⁸ In the 15 hour-long battle, 54 soldiers were killed, 17 were wounded, and 60 were taken prisoner.⁹⁹

Only a week later on 7 September 1996, the insurgency attacked and killed thirty soldiers assigned to the 2nd Mobile Brigade operating near La Carpa Military Base in San José del Guaviare, Guaviare department. A similar attack occurred on 21 December 1997, when the FARC-EP attacked a military base located in Patascoy, Nariño department. In this operation the guerrillas killed eight soldiers and kidnapped eighteen.

The attacks on Las Delicias and Patascoy were followed by a guerrilla campaign focused on clearing entire areas of government presence. As such, mayors, governors, elected public officials, and representatives of the central government were assassinated throughout the country. In accordance with the Bolivarian Campaign for a New Colombia, special emphasis was placed upon isolating Bogotá from the rest of the country. But perhaps the most significant guerrilla victories were yet to come.

On 3 March 1998, the 52nd counter guerrilla battalion of the newly formed 3rd Mobile Brigade, an elite military unit composed exclusively of specially trained professional military soldiers, was ambushed and practically annihilated near El Billar, Caquetá. Sixty two soldiers were killed in action while an additional forty three were taken prisoner. However, the true gravity of this defeat for the Colombian military was felt when it was subsequently revealed that the soldiers belonging to the 52nd counter guerrilla battalion were on a special mission to “reestablish the state’s rule of law in the area and to destroy the criminal infrastructure that the narco-guerrillas had constructed within it.”¹⁰⁰ In particular, the main objective of the secret mission was to capture Jorge Briceño Suárez, alias el Mono Jojoy, the FARC-EP’s military strategist and commander of the organization’s most powerful military command, the Eastern Bloc. When this

⁹⁸ Thomas Marks, “Colombian Army Counterinsurgency,” *Crime, Law and Social Change* 40 (2003): 80.

⁹⁹ *Fuerzas Militares para la Guerra: La agenda pendiente de la reforma militar*, by Alfredo Rangel Suárez, director (Bogotá: Fundación Seguridad y Democracia, 2003), 21-25.

¹⁰⁰ *Fuerzas Militares para la Guerra: La agenda pendiente de la reforma militar*, by Alfredo Rangel Suárez, director (Bogotá: Fundación Seguridad y Democracia, 2003), 22.

information was divulged to the public, it had an extremely negative impact on the government's image and on the morale of the Colombian military. Colombian journalist and author Alfredo Rangel comments:

The events which recently took place in Caquetá reveal in a very serious manner the military threat that the FARC represent to the state and the degree of vulnerability of the military forces. What has happened there is very significant in that what occurred was combat in an open battlefield, on an important scale, between members of the Army's and the guerrillas' elite military forces: professional military soldiers from a mobile brigade and the most experienced guerrillas from the FARC's southern bloc. Different from what occurred at Las Delicias, a forgotten and marginal base composed of raw recruits, this was a forward operating base, a combat zone, with experienced soldiers. The weight of this disastrous outcome resulting from the collision of military forces evidences the military situation of both bands.¹⁰¹

Finally, the last major attack that the FARC-EP executed during the Samper administration coincided with the run-up to the inauguration of newly-elected President Andrés Pastrana. On 3 August 1998, 1,200 guerrillas under the command of Jorge Briceño Suárez attacked a company assigned to the 19th Infantry Battalion, Seventh Brigade, Fourth Division located at the Colombian National Police's antinarcotics' base in Miraflores, Guaviare. One hundred police officers and soldiers were kidnapped, thirty were killed, and fifty were wounded in the FARC-EP's final "goodbye" to President Samper and his administration.

By 1998, the FARC-EP stood at the pinnacle of revolutionary guerrilla power. Consisting of 18,000 guerrillas distributed among 61 rural fronts, four mobile columns, 15 mobile companies, and five urban fronts, the guerrilla organization had increased its membership by an astonishing 1,800% in just sixteen years.¹⁰² It maintained an armed presence in every department throughout Colombia and was reported to control approximately forty percent of the national territory. During the 1990s, the FARC-EP achieved the heights of its military power and was positioned to deal what many believed

¹⁰¹ *Fuerzas Militares para la Guerra: La agenda pendiente de la reforma militar*, 23.

¹⁰² Colombian military, "Apreciación evolutiva de las FARC," Unpublished Colombian military Internal Document, May 2000, 16.

would be the death blow to the government of Colombia.¹⁰³ However, rapid infusions of military hardware and badly needed financial assistance from the United States, as well as a rigorous program designed to transform the Colombian military, would allow the government of Colombia, at the dawning of the 21st century, to recover gradually some of the political and military ground ceded to the FARC-EP during the lost decade of the 1990s.

C. ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS

In an effort to achieve the political-military objectives associated with the Bolivarian Campaign for a New Colombia, significant changes would have to be made to the internal structure of the FARC-EP. These changes, which were more than a decade in the making, would allow the EMC to employ its fielded guerrilla forces with greater flexibility and lethality. Similarly, the appointment of Jorge Briceño Suárez, alias el Mono Jojoy, as the FARC-EP's military strategist and sixth in command of the guerrilla organization, would allow the movement to score significant victories against the Colombian military. Interestingly, the rapid influx of new recruits to the guerrilla organization and the movement's greater involvement in the drug trade did not undermine the revolutionary character of the insurgency or result in its criminalization. This was due to the FARC-EP's stern implementation of its penal code – the *Reglamento de Régimen Disciplinario* – and its continued use of war councils to punish convicted guerrillas. The repeated assassination or purging from the ranks of “bourgeois” or “counterrevolutionary” elements convinced most guerrillas to obey the dictates of their superiors. This allowed the FARC-EP to maintain the revolutionary cohesion of the organization even while it increased its participation in the drug trade and other lucrative, yet highly illegal activities.

At the FARC-EP's Eighth Conference (11-18 April 1993) the senior leadership of the guerrilla organization ordered the most radical internal reorganization of the guerrilla movement in its thirty year history. This decision was based on at least four

¹⁰³ Colombian military, “*Apreciación evolutiva de las FARC*,” Unpublished Colombian military Internal Document, May 2000, 16.

considerations.¹⁰⁴ First, the Colombian military's bombing of La Casa Verde on 9 December 1990 convinced the guerrillas that from that moment forward the senior leadership of the organization would have to remain geographically dispersed. This would improve the survivability of the central command and limit, they reasoned, the possibility of losing the senior guerrilla leaders to a single, well planned and executed military attack.

Second, the rapid increase in the number of guerrilla combatants and the proliferation of fronts throughout the length and breadth of the nation made the senior leadership realize that if the EMC were to maintain control of the guerrilla organization, it would have to devolve power to subordinate regional commanders and their staffs. By 1996, the insurgency would consist of 7,500 guerrilla combatants assigned to 62 rural fronts, three urban fronts, and nine mobile units. It would maintain a strong presence in 460 out of the nation's more than 1,000 municipalities – a 28% increase since 1986.¹⁰⁵ The EMC would still act as the central command authority for the FARC-EP, establishing overall strategic guidance and policies, but the subordinate regional commanders would be responsible for implementing the EMC's decisions and ensuring their successful execution.

Third, the senior leadership reasoned that by appointing high ranking members of the EMC to head the regional commands, they would be able to extend a level of prestige and importance to the political and military actions occurring within each geographic region of the country. Additionally, the appointment of members of the EMC to head the regional commands, or “blocs” as they would later become known, would allow the command authority to supervise the execution of the insurgency’s political and military plans. It would also allow the bloc commanders the ability to hold their subordinate front commanders accountable for their actions.

¹⁰⁴ The following information regarding the internal organization of the FARC-EP is derived from the following sources: Ferro Medina and Uribe Ramón, *El orden de la Guerra*, 50-53, 117; “*El Repliegue de las FARC: ¿Derrota o Estratégia?*,” 8; Eduardo Pizarro Leongómez. *Una democracia asediada* (Bogotá: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2004), 93-98.

¹⁰⁵ Bibiana Mercado and Orlando Leon Restrepo, “Report Profiles FARC’s Leadership, Strategy,” *El Tiempo* (Bogotá), 29 June 1997, sec. 8A, FBIS, accession no. FTS19970811000019.

Fourth, the guerrilla leaders realized that the current organization of the FARC-EP, in independent, uncoordinated tactical level units known as fronts, would have to be altered if the movement were to transition successfully from guerrilla warfare to maneuver warfare. In order to be able to construct the large guerrilla columns associated with a war of positions, regional commanders would have to be able to draw guerrillas from all of the fronts operating within their area of influence. Similarly, it would also require the periodic transfer of guerrillas between fronts so as to augment other guerrilla units engaged in battle with the Colombian military or National Police. Consequently the old system of guerrilla organization based upon tactical level fronts would have to be replaced by a new system based upon operational level blocs.

The new system of internal guerrilla organization was based upon the creation of seven regional commands: five blocs - the Eastern, Southern, Northwestern, Caribbean, and Middle Magdalena - and two joint commands - the Joint Central Command and the Joint Western Command. [See Figures 3. and 4.] There are at least three differences between the blocs and joint commands. First, while blocs are composed of at least five fronts that receive their guidance from a bloc commander, who is also a member of the EMC, a joint command consists of four or less fronts led by a “coordinator” that receives his guidance directly from the EMC. As an example, Jorge Briceño Suárez, alias el Mono Jojoy, is currently the commander of the Eastern bloc, yet occupies simultaneously the position of military strategist on the EMC.

Second, the EMC’s formal recognition of a bloc indicates that the FARC-EP has established a certain degree of guerrilla dominance within a given region of the country. The designation of an area as a joint command, however, indicates that the “necessary conditions” required for the insurgency to exercise a strong presence and influence over the region are still not present. Therefore, according to these distinguishing traits, the natural progression for the FARC-EP would be for the organization to eventually consist of seven blocs.

Third, each bloc has an *Estado Mayor* which supports the bloc commander by coordinating the various political-military campaigns that the subordinate fronts will subsequently execute. These support staffs are also responsible for assisting the bloc

commander with the dissemination of information to the fronts regarding the implementation of new policies, procedures, and/or regulations. Joint Commands, however, do not have such support staffs and are dependent upon the “coordinator” for the dissemination of such information.

In addition to the creation of blocs and fronts the senior leadership also created the General Command (*el Comando general*). This entity would only come into existence upon the execution of the FARC-EP’s final offensive against the government. The General Command, composed of members from the Secretariat and the Blocs, would provide the guidance and supervision necessary for defeating the Colombian military and seizing control of the nation. However, as the FARC-EP has yet to attempt a final offensive, this command to date has never been activated.¹⁰⁶

Finally, the senior leadership increased the number of members assigned to the EMC and the Secretariat from seventeen and five to twenty five and seven respectively. One of the new leaders to be appointed to the Secretariat, the top decision making body within the FARC-EP, was Jorge Briceño Suárez, alias el Mono Jojoy. This nearly illiterate and poorly educated guerrilla leader was born and raised in the guerrilla community of El Duda located in the municipality of La Uribe, Meta department.¹⁰⁷ He joined the FARC-EP in 1975 and quickly distinguished himself as a gifted military strategist and capable guerrilla leader. Rising quickly through the ranks, el Mono Jojoy was appointed to the Secretariat in 1993 when he was given the position of chief military strategist and named the sixth in command of the guerrilla organization. From his newfound position of power, el Mono Jojoy planned and coordinated some of the FARC-EP’s most successful guerrilla attacks against the Colombian military including the siege and fall of Las Delicias and La Carpa military bases. He also pioneered a guerrilla tactic, known as “massive attack”, in which hundreds or thousands of guerrillas attack a single, poorly defended target.

The senior leadership’s decision to make Jorge Briceño Suárez a member of the Secretariat indicated the organization’s abandonment of “the combination of all forms of

¹⁰⁶ Ferro Medina and Uribe Ramón, *El orden de la guerra*, 51.

¹⁰⁷ Mercado and Restrepo, “Report Profiles FARC’s Leadership, Strategy,” sec. 8A.

struggle” and the adoption of a hard line military approach to the conflict. Combined with the insurgency’s radical internal reorganization and decision to switch from guerrilla warfare to maneuver war, the addition of el Mono Jojoy as the organization’s lead military commander illustrate the guerrilla organization’s efforts to realize its primary political and military objectives - the defeat of Colombian military and overthrow of the central government.

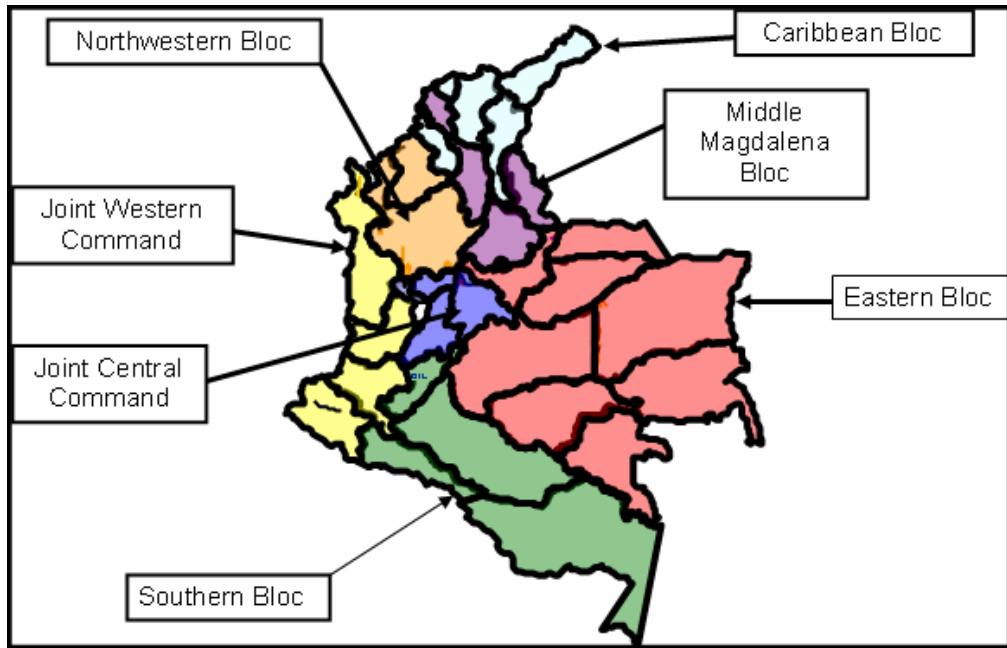


Figure 3. The FARC-EP’s Five Blocs and Two Joint Commands¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Ferro Medina and Uribe Ramón, *El orden de la guerra*, 52-53.

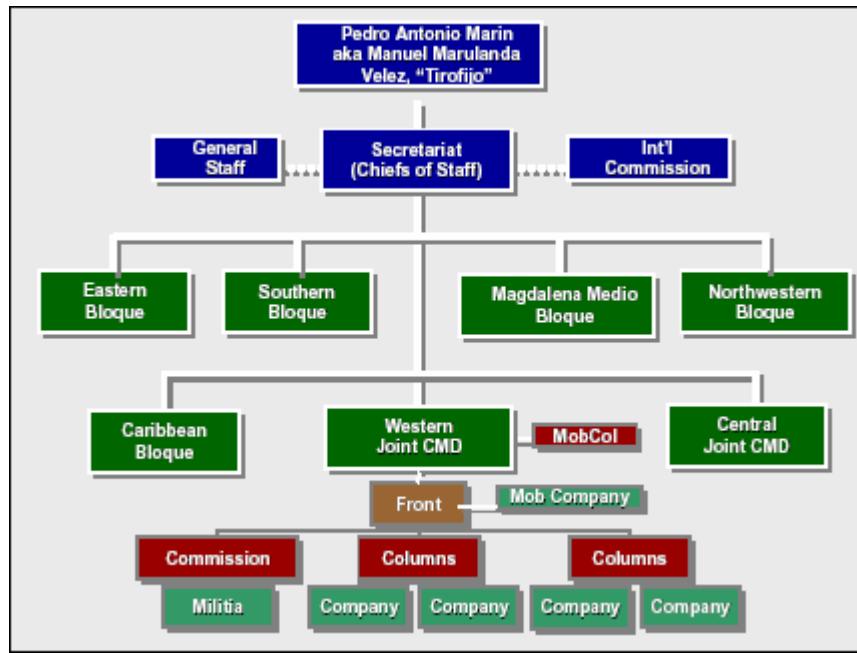


Figure 4. FARC-EP Organizational Diagram¹⁰⁹

D. RESOURCES

At the FARC-EP's 1989 plenum, the senior leadership determined that, "The successful execution of the Bolivarian Campaign for a New Colombia will depend upon the correct interpretation and application of the FARC-EP's financial policies....It is necessary that we make a greater effort to explore new possibilities for obtaining greater financial resources...."¹¹⁰ In accordance with this strategic guidance, the guerrilla organization set out in the 1990s to establish various financial bases of support that would fund the movement's transformation into a "little guerrilla army." One of the many sources that would finance the FARC-EP's revolutionary dream was the drug trade.

After a slight reduction in coca cultivation from 37,500 hectares in 1990 to 37,100 hectares in 1991, coca production dramatically increased beginning in 1993. This increase coincided with the FARC-EP's decision, reached at its 1993 Eighth Guerrilla Conference, to take advantage of the geographic isolation and ideal climatic conditions of southern Colombia in order to transform it into the primary coca production center in the

¹⁰⁹ Darren D. Sprunk, "Transformation in the Developing World: An Analysis of Colombia's Security Transformation" (Thesis, The Naval Postgraduate School, 2004), 31.

¹¹⁰ FARC-EP, "Conclusiones de Finanzas," *Historia de las FARC*, Unpublished FARC-EP Internal Document, 189.

country. To aid in this endeavor, some 161,000 people immigrated to the coca rich department of Putumayo between 1993 and 2000. Within seven years the population of this southern department had more than doubled from 154,000 inhabitants in 1993 to 315,000 in 2000.¹¹¹

The dramatic influx of people into Putumayo - and later into Caquetá and Guaviare – provided the FARC-EP with a willing and able labor force eager to take advantage of the economic benefits associated with the “coca boom.” Between 1994 and 1998, coca production grew within the department from 5,000 hectares to 30,100 hectares – a 600% percent increase in just four years.¹¹² On a national level, the quantity of coca produced in Putumayo accounted for 9.2% of the nation’s total of 44,800 hectares of land cultivated with coca in 1994.¹¹³ When combined with the amount of land cultivated for coca production purposes in Guaviare and Caquetá, the three departments accounted for 83.2% of the nation’s total of coca cultivated areas in 1994. By 2000, Putumayo would overtake Guaviare and Caquetá and emerge as the nation’s leading production center for coca accounting for approximately 40% or 66,022 hectares of the nation’s 163,289 total hectares.¹¹⁴ Although there would be some changes in the order of coca leaf production, Caquetá, Putumayo, and Guaviare would continue to be the primary production centers of coca, and FARC-EP wealth, for the next ten years.

The FARC-EP’s involvement in the drug trade did not limit itself to coca cultivation, but rather encompassed a newly emerging drug on the Colombian market – heroin. Between 1992 and 1994 more than 20,000 hectares of land – concentrated in the departments of Cauca, Huila, Santander, and Tolima - were cultivated with poppy.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Ricardo Vargas Meza, *Drogas, conflicto armado, y desarrollo alternativo: Una perspectiva desde el sur de Colombia* (Bogotá: Gente Nueva Editorial, 2003), 41.

¹¹² Ibid., 39.

¹¹³ Government of Colombia, *Ministerio del Interior y de Justicia, Dirección Nacional de Estupefacientes, “Cultivos ilícitos y el programa de erradicación,”* 3, available from http://www.cultivosilicitoscolombia.gov.co/documentos/historia_cultivos_ilicitos.pdf; Internet; accessed on 7 June 2005.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 4.

¹¹⁵ Government of Colombia, *Ministerio del Interior y de Justicia, Dirección Nacional de Estupefacientes, “Cultivos ilícitos y el programa de erradicación,”* 3, available from http://www.cultivosilicitoscolombia.gov.co/documentos/historia_cultivos_ilicitos.pdf; Internet; accessed on 7 June 2005, 3.

The Colombian version of this drug, which many U.S. law enforcement experts then considered to be the purest in the world, made its debut on the streets of the United States in 1991 and sold for \$150,000 a kilo (2.2 pounds) – more than seven times the value of an equal amount of cocaine.¹¹⁶ After an aggressive eradication campaign, the Colombian government was able to reduce the amount of poppy cultivated within its borders by 2001 to its present level of approximately 4,026 hectares.¹¹⁷

Although the exact amount of money the movement earned during the 1990s is unknown, some estimates place the FARC-EP’s yearly annual income in the hundreds of millions of dollars.¹¹⁸ According to one recent report, “Even on the basis of a conservative estimate of an average of \$100 million a year [*earned through the FARC-EP’s participation in the drug trade*] the FARC and the AUC [United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia] would have earned \$1 billion to \$1.5 billion in the past ten to twelve years.”¹¹⁹ Of this amount, an estimated 45% - 50% was likely earned through the organization’s participation in the drug trade.¹²⁰ The remaining amount was earned through the insurgency’s extortion of oil companies and other major corporations, kidnapping, and its participation in a relatively new phenomenon known as “armed clientelism.”

The Constitution of 1991 decentralized political power to the departmental and municipal levels. As a result, the mayors and governors of Colombia’s respective cities and departments were authorized to use revenues allocated by the central government as they saw fit. The intention was to empower local government leaders, who were believed to have better knowledge of departmental and municipal concerns, to use the central

¹¹⁶ Stan Yarbro, “Cocaine Traffickers Diversify With Heroin Colombia: Indians in the South Turn to Opium Poppy Cultivation. Experts Say the Scourge is Likely to Grow,” *Los Angeles Times*, 3 November 1991, 10, ProQuest, accession no. 61531880.

¹¹⁷ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Colombia Coca Cultivation Survey,” 47.

¹¹⁸ For more information see “Committee Said Studying Insurgent Finances,” *Cambio* 16, 17 July 1995, 38-46, FBIS, accession no. FTS19950717000044; María Cristina Caballeros, “Sources, Amounts of Guerrilla Funding Noted,” *Cambio* 16, 6 July 1998: 28-31, FBIS, accession no. FTS19980707001747.

¹¹⁹ International Crisis Group (ICG), “War and Drugs in Colombia,” Latin America Report No 11 (London: ICG, 2005), 19.

¹²⁰ International Crisis Group (ICG), “Colombia: Presidential Politics and Peace Prospects,” Latin America Report No 14 (London: ICG, 2005), 12.

government revenues for the overall improvement of their communities. Unfortunately for Bogotá and the rest of the nation, the FARC-EP planned to use the government allocated funds for purposes other than those originally intended.

In an effort to acquire control over the municipal budgets, the FARC-EP in the early 1990s began to practice what later became known as “armed clientelism” (*el clientelismo armado*). This tactic involved the identification of political candidates willing to grant the guerrilla organization access to municipal or departmental revenues. In exchange, the FARC-EP promised to finance the political campaigns of the politicians and to assure their election to public office. Once installed, the politicians were expected to honor their agreements with the FARC-EP and to support and enact legislation that was favorable to the guerrillas. Failure to comply with this “gentlemen’s agreement” generally resulted in the assassination of the public official. In this manner, the FARC-EP was able simultaneously to establish control over the local governments and obtain additional financial resources necessary for funding the Bolivarian Campaign for a New Colombia.¹²¹

The hundreds of millions of dollars acquired from the FARC-EP’s participation in the aforementioned illegal activities were not used for personal aggrandizement, but rather to equip and sustain the guerrilla forces. In 1995, the Inter-Institutional Committee for the Study of Finances of the Subversives, described by a leading Colombian periodical as “a secret investigative group formed by the national government to follow the trail of the armed rebels’ money,” reported that the FARC-EP spent at least five billion pesos (approximately five million dollars) annually on the purchase or manufacture of military equipment.¹²² Subsequent reports detailed similar information and added that the quality and sophistication of the FARC-EP’s weaponry had improved in recent years. This assessment was later confirmed when it was observed that the FARC-EP was employing high power firearms such as AK-47s, AKMs, Galils, and

¹²¹ Germán Castro Caycedo, *Sin Tregua* (Bogotá: Editorial Planeta Colombiana S.A., 2003), 13-48.

¹²² “Committee Said Studying Insurgent Finances,” *Cambio 16*, 38-46.

FALs.¹²³ More powerful military hardware including mortars, grenade launchers, machineguns, and semi-automatic rifles were also observed to be part of the movement's standard military inventory.

The FARC-EP also used its money to purchase advanced communications equipment necessary for coordinating large-scale attacks against the Colombian military. By 1998, it was estimated that the organization spent 14 billion pesos on personnel and rations (approximately nine million dollars), 30.3 billion pesos (approximately twenty million dollars) on war materiel, and 10.4 billion pesos (approximately seven million dollars) on logistics and related supplies annually.¹²⁴ Subsequent reports indicated the organization invested an additional 2.1 billion pesos (approximately 1.4 million dollars) on explosives and 5.2 billion pesos (approximately \$3.4 million dollars) on medical services and drugs.¹²⁵

Absent from these reports is anything that suggests or implies that the organization might have used its revenues for purposes other than those associated with the Bolivarian Campaign for a New Colombia. In fact, all financial statistics indicate that the FARC-EP used its resources to attain the political and military objectives associated with the organization's strategic plan for defeating the Colombian military and toppling the central government. Such information serves to bolster the argument that the FARC-EP's financial actions were taken in order to support its strategic plan for acquiring revolutionary power.

E. CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has argued that the period 1990-1998 witnessed the FARC-EP's overwhelmingly successful implementation of the Bolivarian Campaign for a New Colombia – the guerrilla organization's strategic plan for defeating the Colombian military and toppling the central government. It has been shown that the movement coordinated its political-military and economic actions so as to achieve its strategic objectives. As part of this plan, the organization embarked upon the most radical internal

¹²³ Marks, "Colombian Army Counterinsurgency," 90.

¹²⁴ Caballeros, "Sources, Amounts of Guerrilla Funding Noted," 28-31.

¹²⁵ "Report on Guerrilla Organizations' Finances," *El Espectador* (Bogotá), 6 July 1998, FBIS, accession no. FTS19980706001407.

reorganization in the movement's thirty year history. As a result, from 1996-1998 the FARC-EP was able to engage and defeat consistently the Colombian military and National Police in large-scale battles involving hundreds and sometimes thousands of guerrillas operating in column formations. The stunning victories of the guerrilla organization against the nation's security forces would prove so decisive that some international observers writing in 1996 would predict the imminent fall of the Government of Colombia.

This chapter has also shown that the FARC-EP's actions, based on the strategic guidance reached by the organization's senior leadership at its 1982 Seventh Guerrilla Conference, 1989 Guerrilla Plenum, and 1993 Eighth Guerrilla Conference, were consistent with those of a revolutionary guerrilla organization and not a criminal enterprise. As such, the correct interpretation and understanding of the subversive organization's actions must be viewed within this framework. Finally, the significant achievements realized between 1990 and 1998 would enable the FARC-EP to dictate the terms of future peace talks with the presidential administration of Andrés Pastrana.

IV. FROM STRATEGIC ADVANCE TO STRATEGIC WITHDRAWAL (1998-2005)

“The FARC is a state in gestation.”¹²⁶

Juvenal Ovidio Ricardo Palmera Piñeda, alias Simón Trinidad,
Former FARC-EP Finance Chief

A. INTRODUCTION

While the stunning victories of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC-EP) over the Colombian military in 1996 and 1997 did not result in the government’s demise as the insurgency had hoped, they did lead the newly elected government of President Andrés Pastrana Arango (1998-2002) to grant two of the FARC-EP’s key strategic objectives: an extended peace process and a 42,139 square kilometer demilitarized zone (or *despeje*). The launching of peace talks and the granting of the *despeje*, in combination with the inauguration of U.S. financial aid for Plan Colombia, focused the attention of many domestic and international observers on the behavior of the guerrilla organization. What they saw led many to speculate that the guerrilla organization had abandoned its ideological beliefs and devolved into a criminal enterprise.

These critics cite the guerrilla organization’s use of the *despeje* to cultivate more than 35,000 hectares of coca, engage in illicit arms-for-drugs transfers, and house kidnapped victims for ransom as evidence of the insurgency’s degeneration into a criminal organization.¹²⁷ They point to the numerous attacks that the insurgency launched against civilian and military targets, repeatedly undermining the peace process, as proof that the organization had no interest in concluding a peace agreement with the Government of Colombia and only participated in the peace talks in order to acquire the *despeje* – an area whose climatologic conditions, proximity to the international border, and isolation from the Colombian military and National Police made it the ideal location to expand the insurgency’s participation in the illegal drug trade.

¹²⁶ All translations from the Spanish are the author’s unless otherwise indicated.

¹²⁷ OxResearch, “US/Colombia: Rebels Complicate Drug Fight,” *OxResearch*, (2 March 2000): 1.

Finally, the critics see the guerrilla organization's reluctance to confront advancing Colombian military troops during the period 2003-2005 and its withdrawal from areas that it had dominated for the last twenty years, as evidence that the organization is more interested in protecting its illicit resources than in defending its "revolutionary" cause.

This chapter challenges these interpretations of the FARC-EP's behavior between 1998 and 2005, arguing instead that the organization remains a politically driven and ideologically motivated guerrilla insurgency. The FARC-EP's manipulation of the peace process and its illicit use of the *despeje* were designed to afford the guerrilla organization the time and space it needed in order to prepare its forces to advance to the next phase of war against the state – the urbanization of the conflict. Similarly, the FARC-EP's refusal to engage government troops carrying out a counteroffensive should be interpreted as a strategic withdrawal, designed to "wait out" the government.

In addition, the insurgency's mobilization of the *despeje*'s residents, its political indoctrination of the same in Marxist-Leninist teachings, and the organization's efforts to construct an alternate society or shadow government within the *zona* – known as New Colombia (*la Nueva Colombia*) -- that directly challenged the legitimacy of the Colombian state and mobilized the populace in support of the revolution attest to the FARC-EP's efforts to establish an independent republic. (The Colombian military discovered additional insurgent-created alternate societies or shadow governments located along the banks of the Caguán River during its 2004 offensive.) Finally, the insurgency's use of the *despeje* to cultivate coca and to engage in narco-trafficking was at best a secondary objective which provided the guerrilla organization with the means to achieve its revolutionary objectives. In sum, the political-military behavior of the FARC-EP from 1998 to 2005 shows that the organization had not weakened its commitment to its revolutionary goals despite its increased involvement in the drug trade during the same period.

This chapter also addresses the claim that FARC-EP's involvement in the drug trade may undermine the organization's ideological character *in the future* by leading to an influx of recruits interested primarily in making a profit. Indeed, there is evidence that

the average guerrilla member's commitment to the organization's heterogeneous ideology has weakened over the last five years. However, this has been caused not by greater involvement in the drug trade, but rather by the increased pressure that the FARC-EP finds itself under as a result of its offensive against the government and the U.S.-backed government counteroffensive. In particular, the dilution of the FARC-EP's ideological beliefs among rank-and-file guerrillas is attributable to three factors: the poor quality and youth of the new recruits, the limited education of most of the guerrillas, and the increased operations tempo which has prevented the thorough political indoctrination of the rank and file. As a result of these obstacles, the average guerrilla's understanding of the FARC-EP's ideological beliefs has been severely eroded and, if left unaddressed, might result in the degeneration of the organization into a rebel movement without a cause.

Finally, the chapter shows that the FARC-EP continues to allocate its resources in a way consistent with its ideological and political goals. The insurgency utilizes its profits not only to finance its war against the Colombian government, but also to provide for the welfare of its guerrillas and their families. The insurgency has also invested hundreds of thousands of dollars (or more) in the maintenance and upkeep of twelve internet pages, five clandestine radio stations, and various other means of communication. Such actions, while highly unusual for a criminal enterprise, are consistent with those of a revolutionary organization that aspires to acquire international support via the dissemination of political propaganda. These attempts to spread its message to the international community further illustrate that, despite the guerrilla organization's diplomatic and international isolation, it continues to seek support from abroad and to justify its war against the Colombian military as a legitimate struggle for "social justice."

B. POLITICAL-MILITARY

As the decade of the 1990s drew to a close, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC-EP) stood at the zenith of military power. Consisting of approximately 18,000 guerrillas distributed among 61 fronts, equipped with modern automatic rifles and advanced communication equipment, and funded through its ever-increasing involvement in the illicit drug trade, the ranks of the guerrilla organization had

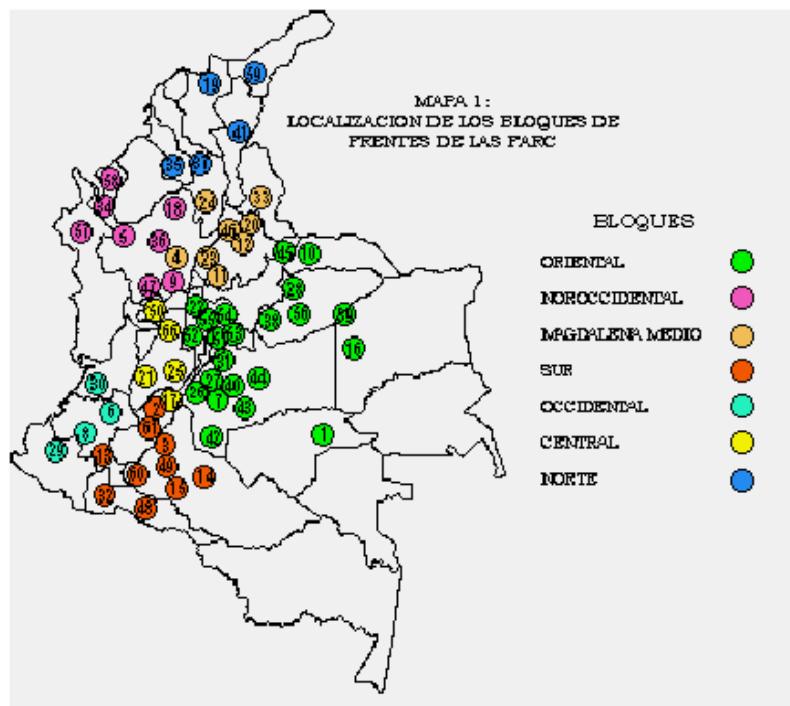
grown by more than 1,800% in the course of just sixteen years. [See Figure Five for the distribution of FARC-EP forces according to blocs, joint commands, and fronts as of April 1999.] Such unparalleled growth combined with a radical internal reorganization and the implementation of the long heralded “new method of operating” had allowed the organization to inflict crushing defeats on the Colombian military between 1996 and 1998. The FARC-EP’s victories against the Colombian armed forces were so one-sided that some national and international observers writing during this period assessed that the insurgency was winning the war.¹²⁸

However, despite these impressive accomplishments, the FARC-EP had failed to achieve many of the objectives outlined in the Bolivarian Campaign for a New Colombia – the insurgency’s war plan for defeating the Colombian military and toppling the central government.¹²⁹ This realization caused the senior leadership of the FARC-EP to refocus its efforts in order to achieve four objectives key to the insurgency’s military defeat of the Colombian armed forces: the urbanization of the conflict; the recruitment, training, and equipping of an additional 14,000 insurgents; the procurement of specialized training in urban guerrilla warfare and explosives; and, the Government of Colombia’s and international community’s official recognition of the FARC-EP as a belligerent. But accomplishing these goals would not be easy.

The FARC-EP realized that, in order to achieve these objectives, it would need to acquire two elements essential to the success of any guerrilla organization: space and time. To acquire the first element, the FARC-EP would demand as a precondition for its participation in peace talks that the government cede a 42,139 square kilometer demilitarized zone (or *despeje* as it was more commonly referred to in Spanish). What the insurgents referred to as a “peace laboratory,” was in fact a Switzerland-size base that it would use to prepare for its final offensive against the Colombian military.

¹²⁸ *Fuerzas Militares para la Guerra: La agenda pendiente de la reforma militar*, by Alfredo Rangel Suárez, director (Bogotá: *Fundación Seguridad y Democracia*, 2003), 26.

¹²⁹ For a more detailed description of the four phases associated with the Bolivarian Campaign for a New Colombia, see Chapter II of this thesis.



Note: The five blocs – Eastern (Oriental), Northwestern (Noroccidental), Middle Magdalena (Medio Magdalena), Southern (Sur), and Northern (Norte) and two joint commands - Western Joint Command (Occidental), Joint Central Command (Central), and Northern (Norte) are arranged according to color.

Figure 5. Disposition of FARC-EP Forces According to Blocs and Fronts as of April 1999¹³⁰

1. FARC-EP Motivations for the Creation of a Demilitarized Zone

The senior leadership of the FARC-EP recognized at its 1982 Seventh Guerrilla Conference that taking the war to the so-called “Gordian knot of contradictions” – the nation’s cities – would be key in attaining a military victory against the Colombian armed forces. However, difficulties associated with infiltrating rural personnel into the cities and later recruiting new members from among a largely unsympathetic, urban populace had prevented the insurgency from making any significant progress. Additionally, intangible barriers, such as the FARC-EP’s lack of understanding of contemporary urban culture and of the concerns which preoccupy the average middle-class worker, prevented

130 Camilo Echandía Castillo, “Geografía del conflicto armado y de las manifestaciones de violencia en Colombia,” La Universidad de los Andes, Centro de Estudios sobre Desarrollo Económico, Facultad de Economía, presented at la Quinta Conferencia Anual sobre Colombia, Londres, 26 y 27 de abril de 1999, 5.

the guerrilla organization from successfully articulating a political program that appealed to the majority of urban dwellers.¹³¹ Supreme FARC-EP commander, Manuel Marulanda, explains:

I think that we've had an enemy, the worst of all enemies. Do you know who it's been? I'm not talking about the army, or the informants....I'm talking about the isolation of this movement, that's worse than doing without food for an entire week. Between you guys, those of you who are from the cities, and us, those who are from the countryside, there is a huge mountain. Your voices and our voices don't hear one another, and only on rare occasions speak to one another....¹³²

Nevertheless, the FARC-EP remained committed to establishing a robust urban guerrilla presence within the nation's cities – an objective that the guerrillas continued to recognize as the *sine qua non* for winning the war. However, to accomplish this goal the insurgency would first have to increase the size of its force.

Since the FARC-EP's 1989 guerrilla plenum, the insurgency had attempted to construct a “little guerrilla army” whose desired end state was 32,000 insurgents. But, by 1998, the guerrilla organization consisted of only 18,000 guerrillas. In order to meet the FARC-EP's strategic objectives, the insurgency would have to initiate a massive recruiting drive. However, this represented only one part of a much larger equation. Once these raw recruits were selected, they would have to be trained, equipped, and ideologically indoctrinated before they could be sent into battle. To complicate matters, all of this would have to take place while the insurgency fought a guerrilla war against the state.

Nor, as the senior leadership of the FARC-EP recognized, did the guerrilla organization possess the necessary skills required to conduct urban guerrilla warfare. Additionally, its homemade gas cylinder bombs and other rudimentary explosive devices had proven to be highly inaccurate and largely ineffective. Consequently, the FARC-EP realized that it would either have to send its guerrillas abroad to receive specialized training or, conversely, employ representatives from outside sources to accomplish the

¹³¹ Ferro Medina and Uribe Ramón, *El orden de la guerra* (Bogotá: Centro Editorial Javeriano, 2002), 152.

¹³² Ibid., 154.

training in rural areas of the nation. Given the danger that FARC-EP guerrillas traveling abroad were liable to arrest and detention by INTERPOL, and aware that it would be more economical to bring the trainers to Colombia, the insurgency would later choose the latter option.

Finally, in an effort to acquire belligerent status -- a legal term, that under the international rules of war, would have granted the FARC-EP recognition as a state building entity, prevented the Colombian government from accusing or judging captured guerrillas, and obligated third party states to remain neutral until the “dispute of legitimacies” was resolved -- the insurgency would offer for the first time to participate in a *prisoner exchange*.¹³³ The senior leadership, well-aware of the fact that only *states* can participate in such activities, looked to extract this concession from the government by inviting members of the international media to televise images of the more than 400 soldiers, policemen, politicians, and citizens held captive deep in the jungles of Southeastern Colombia. The insurgency hoped that the public, upon seeing the wretched conditions in which the captured personnel lived, would pressure the national congress to pass a law that would allow for a prisoner exchange.

To accomplish these four objectives, the FARC-EP, beginning as early as 1997, demanded the government’s temporary cession of a 42,139 square kilometer area – 3.7% of the national territory - to the insurgency.¹³⁴ Manuel Marulanda made clear in a 2 March 1999 interview that negotiations would not lead to disarmament: “...the FARC would not repeat ‘past errors,’ such as the negotiations in the mid-1980s that led to the demobilization of the M-19 guerrilla movement, and would continue the struggle ‘until victory.’”¹³⁵ The despeje was also to be used in order to bring the “little guerrilla army” within striking distance of Bogotá, and ultimately to win the war. All that the FARC-EP needed to acquire the demilitarized zone was a politician willing to make a deal.

¹³³ Geoff Simons, *Colombia: A Brutal History* (London: Saqi Publishing, 2004), 197-198.

¹³⁴ Thomas Marks, “Colombian Army Counterinsurgency,” *Crime, Law and Social Change* 40 (2003): 6.

¹³⁵ Angel Rabasa and Peter Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2001), 39, available from <http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1339/>; Internet; accessed on 29 July 2005.

2. The FARC-EP – Pastrana Pact and the Creation of the Despeje

In the presidential election of 1998, Horacio Serpa Uribe from the Liberal Party, Andrés Pastrana Arango from the Conservative “New Democratic Force”, and Noemí Sanín from the independent “Yes, Colombia Movement,” squared off in what many at first considered to be an election that could have resulted in a significant political shift in Colombia. Noemí Sanín, the former finance minister during the Samper administration that had improved Colombia’s trade relations with Venezuela, rejected the Conservative and Liberal Parties and appealed to a disenchanted populace tired of “ineffectual political leadership.”¹³⁶ Her opponents, generally viewed by most political commentators and analysts as out of touch with the Colombian people and as men who recalled disgraced President Samper, ran on lukewarm political platforms that did little to impress the voters. Surprisingly, none of the candidates developed a strong position regarding an issue of great significance to many Colombians – peace talks with the guerrillas. This would change, however, on 31 May, 1998 when none of the candidates succeeded in obtaining the required 50.1 percent vote required to win the presidential election. As a result, a run-off ballot was subsequently scheduled for 21 June 1998, between the two candidates that received the largest percentages of votes – Horacio Serpa and Andrés Pastrana.¹³⁷

In the weeks following the 31 May election, Pastrana and his team of campaign advisors realized that the former mayor of Bogotá’s success in the second round of voting would depend upon his ability to develop quickly and articulate a strong position regarding the peace process with the FARC-EP. Acting on the advice of the former Minister of Mines, Álvaro Leyva Durán, Pastrana ordered Víctor G. Ricardo, a member of his campaign committee, to meet with Marulanda. On 15 June 1998, Ricardo traveled to a remote site near the town of San Vicente del Caguán, Caquetá where he met with Marulanda and Jorge Briceño Suárez, alias el Mono Jojoy. During the meeting, Ricardo told Marulanda and Briceño Suárez that Pastrana would demilitarize the five

¹³⁶ Simons, Colombia: A Brutal History, 183.

¹³⁷ Horacio Serpa received 34.6 per cent of the vote, Andrés Pastrana received 34.4 per cent of the vote, and Noemí Sanín shocked the nation by winning an unprecedented 27 per cent of the vote – the largest percentage of votes ever obtained by a non-traditional political party. Source: Simons, Colombia: A Brutal History, 183.

municipalities that the insurgency's senior leadership had previously demanded and personally lead the peace process with the guerrilla organization if he won the election. Ricardo then requested that the FARC-EP, if interested in Pastrana's offer, publicly express its willingness to enter into peace talks with the Government of Colombia, *but only if* Andrés Pastrana won the presidential election. Marulanda and Briceño Suárez agreed to Ricardo's offer and stated that Raúl Reyes, the spokesman for the FARC-EP's International Commission, would soon make an announcement from Mexico City affirming the guerrilla organization's support for the Conservative Party candidate.

On 21 June 1998, Andrés Pastrana was elected the new President of Colombia receiving 6,086,507 votes – almost 500,000 more votes than Horacio Serpa.¹³⁸ Shortly thereafter on 9 July 1998, Pastrana flew to an undisclosed location where he participated in a secret meeting with Marulanda and Briceño Suárez. During this face-to-face encounter, the senior leadership of the guerrilla organization and Pastrana held a two-and-a-half hour long meeting in which they agreed to five key points involving the peace talks. First, four municipalities located in the department of Meta and one municipality located in the department of Caquetá would be demilitarized.¹³⁹ Second, the Government of Colombia would fight the paramilitaries. Third, social protests and other public demonstrations would be decriminalized. Fourth, an alternative crop substitution and development plan would be created. Fifth, the Government of Colombia would discontinue the use of "wanted" posters and financial incentives for information regarding the whereabouts of FARC-EP guerrilla leaders.¹⁴⁰ Pastrana later promised to give the FARC-EP forty-eight hours advanced notice before initiating efforts to retake the *despeje*. With the meeting between the senior leadership of the FARC-EP and Pastrana concluded, the newly elected President of Colombia returned to Bogotá where he publicly announced the results of his meeting with the guerrilla organization.

¹³⁸ Edgar Téllez, Oscar Montes, and Jorge Lesmes, *Diario íntimo de un fracaso* (Bogotá: Editorial Planeta Colombiana, 2002), 35.

¹³⁹ The four municipalities located in Meta that were included in the *despeje* were: Vistahermosa, La Macarena, la Uribe, and Mesetas. The one municipality located in Caquetá that was included in the *despeje* was San Vicente del Caguán.

¹⁴⁰ Téllez, Montes, and Lesmes, *Diario íntimo de un fracaso*, 41.

3. FARC-EP Participation in the Peace Process (1998-2002)

The peace talks between the Government of Colombia and the FARC-EP occurred without a cease-fire in place and were characterized by long periods of silence, punctuated by brief episodes of extreme violence. In the interim, the insurgency and the Pastrana administration, both of whom refused to allow a third party state or international organization to mediate the talks, made overtures indicating their willingness to arrive at a negotiated settlement to the conflict, but in reality did little to achieve this “common goal.” Instead, the peace talks between the two were prefaced consistently by FARC-EP attacks against the Colombian military and National Police. In this manner, many observed, the guerrilla organization continuously arrived at the negotiation table with the upper hand.

In recent years at least two hypotheses have been offered which attempt to account for the FARC-EP’s dualistic behavior of “making war and talking peace.”¹⁴¹ The first one argues that the guerrilla organization was not serious about peace talks with the Government of Colombia and only participated in order to acquire the *despeje*. A second and more convincing hypothesis argues that the guerrilla organization had no incentive to negotiate a peace accord or cease fire with the Government of Colombia because it believed that it was winning the war. Evidence for this assessment can be found in a conversation that reportedly took place between the former commander of the FARC-EP’s Southern Bloc, alias Joaquín Gómez, and Jorge Briceño Suárez. In this conversation, Gómez asks Briceño Suárez to explain why the movement was entering into peace talks with the Pastrana administration *if it was clear to everyone that the FARC-EP was winning the war?* Although Briceño Suárez did not provide Gómez with an answer, he invited the guerrilla commander to a high-level meeting where the senior leadership of the insurgency “...would explain the FARC-EP’s strategy.”¹⁴²

As a result, a “mutually hurting stalemate,” defined as a condition in which the opposing parties in a conflict “...believe that things will get worse if the status quo

¹⁴¹ International Crisis Group, “Colombia’s Elusive Quest for Peace,” ICG Latin America Report No 1, 26 March 2002, 24. Available from http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/report_archive/A400594_26032002.pdf. Accessed on 15 July 2005; Internet.

¹⁴² See Téllez, Montes, and Lesmes, *Diario íntimo de un fracaso*, 34-35.

continues and that another alternative (settlement) is available that will be better than continued war,” never existed between the FARC-EP and the government.¹⁴³ Because the insurgency believed that it was winning the war, it had no incentive to negotiate in good faith with the Pastrana administration and instead manipulated the peace process in order to buy the organization the time and space necessary to further its political and military objectives. The FARC-EP’s actions during its time in the *zona de distensión* substantiate this argument.

4. FARC-EP Use of the Despeje for Military Purposes

The *despeje* was officially established on 7 November 1998, three months after Andrés Pastrana’s inauguration. While this meeting zone was originally scheduled to last for just ninety-days, eleven subsequent extensions of the FARC-EP’s “lease” on this prime real estate would allow the insurgency to maintain control over the territory inhabited by some 90,000 people until 20 February 2002. During this time, the FARC-EP utilized the *despeje* “...as a sanctuary, to support their drug trafficking operations, launch terrorist attacks, and recruit and train their forces.”¹⁴⁴

While the FARC-EP’s use of the *despeje* to carry out illegal activities is undeniable, they were carried out as part of a larger political-military strategy aimed at strengthening its position in Southern and Eastern Colombia as well as in and around Bogotá. To accomplish this objective, the FARC-EP traded coca for weapons, munitions, and war materiel and engaged in a major rearmament program. This allowed it to acquire “...more than 20,000 East German assault rifles, grenade launchers, mortars, SAM-12 surface to air missiles, sophisticated electronic communications equipment and its own small air force.”¹⁴⁵ These weapons were then issued to the estimated 5,000 insurgents that were then believed to be operating within the *despeje* and later employed in offensive guerrilla attacks against civilian and military targets located outside of the *zona*. [See Figure 6 for a map depicting these attacks.] The purpose of the offensives was to reduce

¹⁴³ Roy Licklider, “Obstacles to Peace Settlements,” in *Turbulent Peace*, 2d ed., ed. Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2003), 699, 703.

¹⁴⁴ Congress, House of Representatives, House Appropriations Committee Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, *Written Statement of Major General Gary D. Speer, United States Army, Acting Commander in Chief, United States Southern Command*, 107th Cong., 10 April 2002, 7.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

the Colombian military's and National Police's presence in the areas located adjacent to Bogotá. In this manner, the FARC-EP hoped to improve its chances of consolidating its control over key overland routes, including strategic and mobility corridors, which link the northern tip of the *despeje*, via the Sumapaz mountain chain, to the outskirts of southern Bogotá.

One of the FARC-EP's boldest offensives included the July 1999 multifront attack of 4,000 guerrillas against military towns and bases located in the departments of Meta, Guaviare, Huila, Putumayo, and Caquetá. This was followed in January 2000 by a series of attacks carried out by some 800 guerrillas against military and police positions located in the towns of Une, Quétame, and Guayabetal – some sixty kilometers south of Bogotá. Following the last aforementioned set of attacks, the FARC-EP subsequently cut off land communications between Bogotá and Villavicencio, the capital of Meta department, located approximately 170 kilometers to the southeast of the capital.¹⁴⁶ Jorge Briceño Suárez was later reported to have stated that the FARC-EP was in a position to capture the departmental capitals of Florencia, Caquetá and Villavicencio, Meta but pulled its punches to spin out the peace talks with the Pastrana administration.¹⁴⁷

In an effort to prepare its forces to take the war to the nation's cities, the FARC-EP contracted the services of Niall Connolly, Martin McCauley and James Monaghan. Connolly, who according to the Cuban government served in Havana as the Latin America representative for the Irish Republican Army's (IRA) political wing, Sinn Fein, traveled in 2001 with McCauley, and Monaghan, a former member of the executive board of Sinn Fein and one of the IRA's leading experts on bombs and explosives, to the *despeje* where they reportedly trained the FARC-EP in the use of urban bombing

¹⁴⁶ Rand Corporation, "Colombian Labyrinth," 43.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 44.

skills.¹⁴⁸ The IRA's influence on the FARC-EP would manifest itself in 2003 when the guerrilla organization carried out eleven bombing attacks against civilian and military targets in Bogotá, Cúcuta, Florencia, Neiva, Cali, and Medellín.¹⁴⁹

But the FARC-EP's outside assistance was not limited to the IRA. The guerrillas also allegedly received training from Cuban and Venezuelan soldiers in the use of explosives and larger-caliber arms. Special emphasis was reportedly placed upon shooting down helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft.¹⁵⁰

The Islamic Republic of Iran also reportedly expressed interest in supporting the FARC-EP. According to Téllez, Montes, and Lesmes, in June 1999 the High Commissioner for Peace, Víctor G. Ricardo, the Iranian Ambassador to Colombia, and an undisclosed representative of the cattle ranching industry from San Vicente del Caguán signed an agreement that called for the construction of the largest slaughterhouse and meat processing facility in all of Latin America.¹⁵¹ The facility, in which 20,000 tons of meat was supposedly to be processed and later exported to Iran, was to be located next to an airstrip longer than any of those found at Bogotá's Eldorado International airport. According to the terms of the agreement, regular flights from Iran would land in San Vicente del Caguán where meat would be loaded onto the transport aircraft and flown back to the Middle Eastern nation. To oversee the construction of the slaughterhouse, meat processing facility, and landing strip, Iranian representatives would travel to San Vicente del Caguán where they would remain for two years.

The agreement between the Iranian and Colombian governments looked suspicious from the beginning. However, even more attention was focused upon this effort when it was proven that there were not enough cattle in the San Vicente del Caguán

¹⁴⁸ Scott Wilson, "Colombia's Peace Bid at Risk; Arrest of IRA Trainers Spark Calls to Close Safe Haven for Rebels," *The Washington Post*, 25 August 2001, A13.

¹⁴⁹ Román Ortiz, "Las FARC le apuestan a las ciudades – De El Nogal a la Zona Rosa: el año en que las FARC se decidieron por el terrorismo urbano," *Semana* (Bogotá), no. 1,129 (22 December 2003): 66-69.

¹⁵⁰ Román Ortiz, "Las FARC le apuestan a las ciudades – De El Nogal a la Zona Rosa: el año en que las FARC se decidieron por el terrorismo urbano," *Semana* (Bogotá), no. 1,129 (22 December 2003): 66-69.

¹⁵¹ The following information appears in Téllez, Montes, and Lesmes, *Diario íntimo de un fracaso*, 179-182.

area – or in the entire *despeje* – to meet the requirements of such a large-scale meat processing facility. This aroused the suspicions of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Pentagon, who after closely reviewing the blueprints for the construction of the facilities, determined that the meat processing plant could be used for the storage of missile batteries and similar armaments. Additionally, the materials used in the construction of the facilities would prevent U.S. and Colombian intelligence platforms from identifying the materials contained within the building. Consequently, the CIA advised the Colombian military to do its utmost to prevent the deal between the Colombian and Iranian Governments from coming to fruition. As a result of the United States' intervention, the Colombian government backed out of the deal with the Iranians and prevented the FARC-EP from acquiring weapons that could have turned the tide of the war.



Figure 6. FARC-EP Offensives Originating from the Despeje¹⁵²

¹⁵² Marks, “Colombian Army Counterinsurgency,” 7.

5. FARC-EP Use of the *despeje* for Political Purposes

In addition to using the *despeje* for military purposes, the FARC-EP intended to take advantage of the Government of Colombia's territorial concession in order to establish the Independent Republic of the Caguán (a.k.a. Manuelandia, a.k.a. Farilandia).¹⁵³ To accomplish this, the FARC-EP planned to rely upon its prior experience in state building.

During the 1960s the FARC-EP, along with members of the Liberal and Communist parties, participated in the creation of nine leftwing, independent republics located to the south of Bogotá.¹⁵⁴ Although these areas were later invaded and destroyed by the Colombian military between 1964 and 1966, the creation of these independent republics provided the FARC-EP with a valuable learning experience. The guerrilla organization would later capitalize upon its prior efforts at state building and seek to replicate its experience in the Middle Magdalena region of the country.

Beginning in 1986 and continuing into the early 1990s, the FARC-EP attempted to establish the Independent Republic of Middle Magdalena. However, this political entity, which was to be composed of three small towns -- Puerto Boyacá, Puerto Berrió, and Puerto Parra -- located in the Middle Magdalena region of northern Colombia, never came to fruition as paramilitary forces, under the leadership of Nelson Lesmes and Iván Roberto Duque, conducted a violent and bloody counterinsurgency campaign which defeated the FARC-EP and drove it from the region.¹⁵⁵

Despite these initial failures, the FARC-EP persisted in its efforts to consolidate its political-military control over isolated regions of the country and to establish a new

¹⁵³ José Miguel Narvaéz Martínez, Deputy Director of the *Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad* (Colombian equivalent of U.S. FBI), interview by author, tape recording, 22 September 2005, Bogotá, Colombia.

¹⁵⁴ For information regarding the FARC-EP's attempts to create independent republics during the 1960s see, Eduardo Pizarro Leongómez, *Las FARC (1949-1966): De la autodefensa a la combinación de todas las formas de lucha* (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo Editores and el Instituto de Estudios Políticos y Relaciones Internacionales de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 1991), 39-54, 167-186.

¹⁵⁵ José Miguel Narvaéz Martínez, Deputy Director of the *Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad* (Colombian equivalent of U.S. FBI), interview by author, tape recording, 22 September 2005, Bogotá, Colombia.

and independent republic. A retired Colombian military officer with more than thirty years' experience, and currently a political-military advisor to the Colombian government, explains the insurgency's strategy for achieving this objective:

Since the guerrilla organization's Seventh Guerrilla Conference in 1982, the FARC-EP contemplated in phase two of its strategic plan the consolidation of independent republics. Up until that time, the FARC-EP thought that it would be able to employ a strategy similar to that of Mao's...liberating areas where they would displace [state] authorities and later replace them with local juntas or provisional co-governments. In this way the FARC-EP hoped to establish control over many municipalities. Later, when several neighboring municipalities had been "liberated" the FARC-EP intended to consolidate and integrate them into regions known as "liberated areas." That was what the FARC-EP originally planned to do.

But as it was that they were not able to accomplish this goal and lacked the military strength to take the municipalities by force, the FARC-EP, at its Eighth Guerrilla Conference in 1993, began to talk about the demilitarization of several municipalities. The FARC-EP argued that if it could convince the state to participate in negotiations and give them a *despeje*, in three or four months time they would be able to consolidate political control over the area, win supporters to the cause and create political structures that would allow them to maintain their hold on the territory indefinitely. The FARC-EP believed that once the state granted the insurgency this *despeje*, it would never demand that the guerrilla organization vacate the area. In this way, the FARC-EP believed that it would be able to maintain a permanent hold on the demilitarized zone and establish an independent republic.¹⁵⁶

After the FARC-EP was granted the *zona*, it attempted to establish its political control over the area by "...bringing together the whole population between the ages of 13 and 60 for two or three days" in order to indoctrinate them in Marxist-Leninst theory and "train them in the use of heavy weapons."¹⁵⁷ The FARC-EP organized some of the locals into guerrilla militias known as "Citizen Vigilance" that were charged with "spying on civic, religious, and business groups" and informing the guerrilla organization as to

¹⁵⁶ Identity withheld by request, interview by author, tape recording, 20 September 2005, Bogotá, Colombia. Note: For more information regarding the FARC-EP's intention to use the *despeje* to establish an independent republic see, Luís Alberto Villamarín Pulido, *La Silla Vacía* (Bogotá: Ediciones Luís Alberto Villamarín Pulido, 2002), 15-25.

¹⁵⁷ Larry Rother, "Colombia Rebels Reign in Ceded Area," *New York Times*, 16 May 1999, sec. 1, p. 18.

the existence of potential dissidents. Other citizens were forced to take part in communal activities such as repairing existing roads, painting revolutionary murals, or reconditioning airstrips.¹⁵⁸

The FARC-EP also used the *despeje* to launch its long-in-the making, clandestine political movement -- the Bolivarian Movement for a New Colombia. This movement, which was originally conceived in 1996, was launched on 24 April 2000 in San Vicente del Caguán, Caquetá. The implementation of the movement, a product of the FARC-EP's 21-25 March 2000 Guerrilla Plenum, was designed to rally disparate elements of society behind the guerrilla organization's revolutionary plan for seizing power. According to FARC-EP commander Fernando Caicedo, the Bolivarian Movement for a New Colombia is not an electoral based organization, but rather an accumulation of individuals from various political backgrounds who sympathize with the FARC-EP's revolutionary plan. These "Bolivarians" operate clandestinely and aid the guerrilla organization by mobilizing the masses in support of political projects designed to further the organization's revolutionary objectives.¹⁵⁹ By establishing clandestine "Bolivarian" cells throughout the country, the insurgency hoped to attract new members to its cause and prepare the population for the "inevitable fall" of the central government.

Finally, the FARC-EP took several measures designed to consolidate its political and military control over the *despeje*. First, the guerrilla organization issued new identification cards (*los carnets*) to each of the 90,000 citizens residing in the *despeje*'s five municipalities. Second, it required all visitors to the *zona* to have the official permission of a local front commander before entering the demilitarized area. Third, the insurgency established several rules and regulations governing the behavior of the residents which resulted in a drastic reduction in crime rates. According to the New York Times, only four killings occurred in the first six months that the FARC-EP controlled the *despeje* (October 1998 to April 1999) compared with about ten a week in the months before the guerrilla organization's arrival. Robbery, theft, and rape also dropped

¹⁵⁸ Larry Rother, "Colombia Rebels Reign in Ceded Area," *New York Times*, 16 May 1999, sec. 1, p. 18.

¹⁵⁹ Ferro Medina and Uribe Ramón, *El orden de la guerra*, 148-149.

significantly.¹⁶⁰ Fourth, the FARC-EP placed statues and portraits of Lenin and Simón Bolívar outside of its headquarters in San Vicente del Caguán. Finally, the guerrilla organization imposed “taxes” on the populace including a 10,000 Colombian peso tariff (approximately US\$3.00 dollars) on each head of cattle owned by the local cattle ranchers.¹⁶¹ The revenues collected through the FARC-EP’s simple, yet effective taxation system, were then used to pay for expenses associated with war.

6. The Dissolution of the Despeje and the End of the Peace Process

By late 2001, a series of factors including the FARC-EP’s illegal use of the *despeje*, the Pastrana administration’s inept handling of the peace process, the guerrilla organization’s continued attacks against the civilian populace, and strident opposition from the military and police increased pressure on the administration to dissolve the *zona* and end the peace process. Nevertheless, President Andrés Pastrana, convinced that he was on the verge of achieving an elusive peace, persisted in his efforts to achieve a ceasefire agreement and a political resolution to the conflict.¹⁶² However, a series of events in early 2002 – including the FARC-EP’s hijacking of a civilian aircraft en route to Bogotá and its forced landing on a highway near Neiva, Huila department; aerial photographs which revealed that the FARC-EP had cultivated 35,000 hectares of coca in the southern portion of the *despeje*; and, the kidnapping of Senator and President of the Senate Peace Commission, Eduardo Gómez -- conspired against the President’s wishes and forced him to order the Colombian military to retake the *zona de despeje* on 20 February 2002.

After three years of unsuccessful peace talks with the insurgents and eleven extensions on the *despeje*’s lease, the Pastrana administration had nothing to show for its efforts. However, if the Government of Colombia learned anything from its experiences with the FARC-EP, it was that the insurgency would not negotiate in good faith unless a “mutually hurting stalemate” or balance of power which favored the state existed. These

¹⁶⁰ Rother, “Colombia Rebels Reign in Ceded Area,” sec. 1, p. 18.

¹⁶¹ Téllez, Montes, and Lesmes, *Diario íntimo de un fracaso*, 76.

¹⁶² International Crisis Group, “Colombia’s Elusive Quest for Peace,” 20.

realizations, as well as popular disillusionment with both Pastrana and the FARC-EP, would propel the May 2002 election of hard-liner and independent candidate, Álvaro Uribe Vélez, to the presidency.

7. Colombia and the United States Declare War against the FARC-EP

The FARC-EP greeted President Álvaro Uribe Vélez's ascension to office on 7 August 2002 by launching a mortar attack against the presidential palace that killed twenty and wounded more than sixty civilians.¹⁶³ President Uribe, who had promised to take the war to the FARC-EP and restore governmental control to the entire nation, would later respond by developing a national security doctrine known as the *Democratic Security and Defense Policy*. This strategy, which calls for the state to reassert its control over lawless territories and to provide security to all sectors of society, was based on the fundamental need to strengthen the Colombian military and National Police.¹⁶⁴

The transformation of the Colombian military, which had begun during the Pastrana administration, would continue throughout Uribe's term in office and result in a much better organized and powerful military institution. The revenues needed to finance this transformation were provided by the Colombian Government's increased allotment for defense spending – currently 4.5% of GDP – and the implementation of a “war tax.”¹⁶⁵ The United States also played a key role in modernizing and reforming the institution.¹⁶⁶

According to the 9 May 2005 Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, between fiscal year (FY) 2000 and FY2004, the United States gave Colombia \$4.5 billion dollars in support of Plan Colombia - the Andean nation's six-year plan

¹⁶³ Jeremy McDermott, “Colombian Attacks ‘Have Hallmark of IRA,’” BBC News World Edition, 11 August 2002; available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/2186244.stm>; Internet; accessed on 21 July 2005.

¹⁶⁴ Jorge Restrepo and Michael Spagat, 2004 “The Colombian Conflict: Uribe’s First 17 Months,” Royal Holloway College, University of London: Discussion Papers in Economics 04/09, Department of Economics, Royal Holloway University of London, revised July 2004, 10, available from <http://ideas.repec.org/p/cpr/ceprdp/4570.html>; Internet; accessed on 21 July 2005.

¹⁶⁵ Connie Veillette, “Plan Colombia: A Progress Report” (Washington, D.C.: CRS Report for Congress, Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division, 2005) 13, Order Number RL32774.

¹⁶⁶ For a detailed analysis of the Colombian military’s ongoing transformation see *Fuerzas Militares para la Guerra: La agenda pendiente de la reforma militar*, by Alfredo Rangel Suárez, director (Bogotá: Fundación Seguridad y Democracia, 2003).

(1999- 2005) to end the armed conflict, eliminate drug trafficking, and promote economic and social development.¹⁶⁷ An additional \$463 million dollars in Andean Counterdrug Initiative funding – “the primary U.S. plan that supports Plan Colombia” – and \$90 million in Foreign Military Financing are expected to be approved for FY2006. Of the \$463 million dollars, \$310 million dollars has been allocated for interdiction efforts; \$27.4 million dollars for rule of law programs; and, \$124.8 million dollars for alternative development and institution building indicating a continued emphasis on the military component of Plan Colombia.¹⁶⁸

The United States also assisted in creating, training, and equipping three counter-narcotics battalions, and one brigade - the 5th Mobile brigade - charged with providing security to the nation’s economic lifeline – the Caño Limón – Coveñas oil pipeline. In 2001, the FARC-EP attacked the pipeline a record 171 times causing it to shutdown for four-months and costing the Government of Colombia \$500 million dollars in lost revenues - approximately two-percent of the national budget.¹⁶⁹ However, by 2004, improved security measures along the length of the pipeline would reduce the number of FARC-EP attacks to just seventeen.¹⁷⁰

The United States provided additional assistance to the Government of Colombia when, in the summer of 2002, the Congress removed restrictions which until that time had limited the use of Plan Colombia related funds and equipment for exclusively counterdrug purposes. The removal of this restriction meant that the Colombian military could now employ U.S. supplied military aid and equipment against the FARC-EP and other insurgent organizations. With the Congress’ removal of this restriction, the United States effectively expanded its role in the Andean nation from that of counterdrugs to

¹⁶⁷ Veillette, “Plan Colombia: A Progress Report,” 1.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 2.

¹⁶⁹ Christian Miller, “Chaos in Colombia Blood Spills to Keep Oil Wealth Flowing; Colombia: Violence Explodes in Province Where Army, Under U.S. Pressure, Focuses on Protecting an Occidental Pipeline,” *Los Angeles Times*, 15 September 2002, 8.

¹⁷⁰ Veillette, “Plan Colombia: A Progress Report,” 11.

counterinsurgency. To carry out its expanded mission, the U.S. Government in 2004 increased its military presence in the Andean nation from 400 to 800 personnel and augmented the amount of civilian contractors from 400 to 600.¹⁷¹

8. Libertad Uno, Plan Patriota, and the FARC-EP's Strategic Withdrawal

The renewed emphasis on counterterrorism operations, increased investment in state-building efforts, and strengthening of the state security services quickly began to pay high dividends. By the end of President Uribe's second year in office, the Government of Colombia had made great strides in increasing the level of security throughout the nation. The police had been redeployed to each of Colombia's 1,098 municipalities; 3,500 members of the illegal self-defense groups or paramilitaries had been demobilized; homicides had fallen from 28,837 in 2002 to 20,167 in 2004 – an 18% decrease in two years; and the rate of kidnappings had been reduced significantly.¹⁷² Overall, the *Democratic Security and Defense Policy* seemed to be working. However, the FARC-EP and the nation's smaller and weaker guerrilla organization, the Army of National Liberation (ELN), continued to be a threat to the national security. Consequently, the President ordered the Colombian military to go on the offensive to break the back of the guerrilla organizations.

In July 2003, 8,000 soldiers, under the leadership of General Reynaldo Castellanos, began a military operation – *Libertad Uno* – focused on attacking the thirteen FARC-EP fronts operating in Cundinamarca, the department which surrounds Bogotá.¹⁷³ By the time the operation had concluded in late 2003, the vast majority of the 22nd front, responsible for most of the kidnappings that took place between Bogotá and the outlying countryside, had been destroyed. Those that survived the army's attack fled

¹⁷¹ "US Lawmakers Back Increase in Military Presence in Colombia," Agence France Presse, 24 March 2004, available from <http://www.commondreams.org/headlines04/0324-10.htm>; Internet; accessed on 22 July 2005.

¹⁷² Statistics taken from *República de Colombia, Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, "Ampliación Centro de Estadísticas: Homicidio Común, Secuestro Extorsivo, Desmovilizados, Cocaína Incautada,"* available from <http://alpha.mindefensa.gov.co>; Internet; accessed on 21 July 2005.

¹⁷³ "'Libertad Uno': La batalla contra las FARC," *Semana* (Bogotá), 15 July 2005, available from <http://semana2.terra.com.co/archivo/articulosView.jsp?id=71616>; Internet; accessed on 22 July 2005.

and later joined the ranks of the neighboring 42nd front. However, the army pursued the fleeing guerrillas and later dealt the 42nd a significant blow which forced the guerrilla unit to restructure its internal command.¹⁷⁴

As a result of *Libertad Uno*, the FARC-EP fronts responsible for maintaining control over the approaches to Bogotá were weakened significantly, forcing the remaining guerrilla units to regroup and train new personnel capable of filling the void left by the army's advance. While *Libertad Uno* proved to be a successful first effort at retaking a relatively small amount of territory formerly controlled by the FARC-EP, the Military's offensive into the jungles of Southeastern Colombia may prove to be the decisive confrontation that forces the FARC-EP to concede to unrelenting governmental pressure.

The Colombian military's ongoing push into "the FARC-EP's backyard" is part of a larger military campaign plan, known as *Plan Patriota* or the Patriot Plan, which is designed to return security to the entire nation.¹⁷⁵ The current phase of the operation, which includes an immense area of land – approximately 300,000 square kilometers -- located in the jungle covered Southeastern region of the country, is focused on the departments of Meta, Caquetá, Guaviare, and Vichada.¹⁷⁶ The Colombian military has assembled in these departments the largest offensive military force in the history of the republic. Composed of some 18,000 personnel drawn from all of the nation's military services, Task Force Omega, the military command created to do battle with the estimated 5,000 guerrillas and militia members operating in the Southeastern region of the country, has thus far made significant progress.

In September 2004, the former Minister of Defense, Jorge Alberto Uribe, announced the results of the first phase of military operations in the southeastern region of the country. According to Uribe, the Military seized hundreds of weapons and

¹⁷⁴ "Desmovilización de las Autodefensas de Cundinamarca," by Alfredo Rangel Suárez, director (Bogotá: *Fundación Seguridad y Democracia*, 2005) 1, 4 -5, accessed on 22 July 2005, available from <http://www.seguridadydemocracia.org>; Internet.

¹⁷⁵ "Army Commander Defends Colombian Government's Strategy in Armed Conflict," *El Espectador* (Bogotá), 1 May 2005, internet version.

¹⁷⁶ "Las cifras son otro campo de batalla del Plan Patriota," *El Tiempo* (Bogotá), 2 May 2005, accessed on 15 June 2005; available from <http://eltiempo.terra.com.co>; Internet.

munitions, deactivated nearly 200 minefields and house-bombs, seized 148 pieces of communications equipment, and damaged more than 250 FARC-EP vehicles (including two airplanes and fifty four boats). However, perhaps of greater significance, the former Minister of Defense stated that the military had been able to destroy numerous arms and drug trafficking corridors thereby significantly reducing the logistical capability of the guerrilla organization.¹⁷⁷ Nevertheless, although the FARC-EP has been weakened it is definitely not out of the fight.

9. The FARC-EP's "Resistance Plan" and Strategic Withdrawal

In response to the Government of Colombia's launching of *Plan Patriota*, the FARC-EP initiated a retaliatory offensive known as the "*Comandante Urias Rondón Resistance Plan*." Although little information is known regarding this endeavor, the FARC-EP's recent rash of attacks against military installations and isolated towns and villages, located far from Task Force Omega's theater of operations, suggests that the strategy behind the "*Comandante Urias Rondón Resistance Plan*" may be to relieve Colombian military pressure on the Southeast region by focusing its attacks on other parts of the nation. The FARC-EP's continued attacks also serve notice that the organization, while on the run, is still very much alive.

Accompanying the insurgency's guerrilla attacks on such targets has been the implementation of a new strategy that one political analyst has called a "strategic withdrawal."¹⁷⁸ This strategy, which emphasizes the cession of territory to the Colombian military and the avoidance of direct contact with the armed forces in favor of indirect attacks -- via the use of landmines, explosives, and mortars -- has been employed with success throughout Task Force Omega's theater of operations. Such actions indicate that the FARC-EP, like other guerrilla organizations which have preceded it, is simply conserving its strength and firepower in order to survive and fight another day. In the meantime, the insurgency will continue to employ indirect attacks against the military in

¹⁷⁷ Office of the President of the Republic, "Colombian Armed Forces Reveal Results of First Phase of Plan Patriota," 7 September 2005, FBIS, accession no. LAP20040907000095.

¹⁷⁸ Andrés Villamizar, "*El repliegue de las FARC: ¿Derrota o Estrategia?*," *Fundación Seguridad y Democracia*, accessed on 20 May 2005; available from <http://www.seguridadydemocracia.org>; Internet.

an effort to attrit and demoralize its forces. Later, when the military has tired of fighting, the FARC-EP will regroup and attempt to inflict devastating losses against the armed forces.

Some observers, however, have interpreted the FARC-EP's unwillingness to engage the Colombian military as a sign of the guerrilla organization's impending defeat and imminent demise.¹⁷⁹ They argue that the FARC-EP is quickly being defeated and is more concerned with preserving its illicit wealth than it is in defending its revolutionary cause. These individuals continue to assert that the FARC-EP is nothing more than a criminal organization whose dedication to the drug trade supercedes any professed commitment they may have to revolutionary change. However, this argument fails to consider recent evidence uncovered by the Colombian military's offensive into the jungles of southeastern Colombia.

10. The FARC-EP's Efforts at State-Building

In 2004-2005, as the Colombian military advanced deeper into FARC-EP territory, it began to observe signs of the guerrilla organization's efforts to create the so-called "New Colombia." In many of the isolated towns and villages located in Task Force Omega's theater of operations, where for decades the FARC-EP had reigned as the only semblance of political-military authority, the Colombian military found evidence of the guerrilla organization's efforts to construct alternate societies or "shadow governments." John Baylis, a noted expert on revolutionary warfare, explains the significance of such actions:

Most insurgent movements waste little time in establishing not only a local administrative network but also parallel governmental institutions, which act as a focal point in the battle for the loyalty of the public. Such organs help both to provide a degree of legitimacy for the revolutionary forces and to break the monopoly of legitimacy held by the government.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ This opinion has been expressed by numerous members of the Colombian military and Presidential administration.

¹⁸⁰ John Baylis, "Revolutionary Warfare," *Contemporary Strategy II: The Nuclear Powers*, vol. 2 rev. and enl., ed. John Baylis, Ken Booth, John Garnett, and Phil Williams (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1987), 215.

Historically speaking, numerous guerrilla organizations which predate the FARC-EP - including Mao Tse-tung's Red Army and the North Vietnamese People's Army, led by General Vo Nguyen Giap - created such alternate societies or "states within states." In 1919, the political arm of the IRA, Sinn Fein, created the Dail Eireann – "a 'parallel hierarchy that would compete for legitimacy with the British government."¹⁸¹

In the FARC-EP's case, the insurgency successfully established itself as the de facto governing force in the Southeast region of the country. This was accomplished by several means: the FARC-EP's issuance of new identification cards to each resident identifying their nationality as *Farianos*;¹⁸² the replacement of the Colombian national currency with a monetary system based on the exchange of grams of coca leaf or paste;¹⁸³ the organization of the local populace into militias; the political indoctrination and organization of the masses in support of the revolution; the extraction of "taxes" from local merchants and livestock owners; the creation of several networks of spies and informants; and, the establishment of social regulations or laws governing the behavior of the local residents.¹⁸⁴

These above mentioned examples illustrate that, despite the FARC-EP's involvement in the illicit drug trade, participation in other illegal activities, and strategic withdrawal, the guerrilla organization clearly continues to aspire to political power. The insurgency's efforts to assert its control over the local populace, and to create a competing political entity in direct competition with that of the nation-state, illustrate the FARC-EP's efforts at state-building. Had the guerrilla organization not attempted to carry out any state-building activities, but rather had simply lived among the local populace as a mafia or similar criminal organization, the allegation that the FARC-EP

¹⁸¹ John Baylis, "Revolutionary Warfare," *Contemporary Strategy II: The Nuclear Powers*, vol. 2 rev. and enl., ed. John Baylis, Ken Booth, John Garnett, and Phil Williams (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1987), 215.

¹⁸² "La secreta operación 'J.M.', trabajos militares con objetivos en más de 300 mil kms cuadrados," El Tiempo (Bogotá), 2 May 2005, available from <http://eltiempo.terra.com.co>; Internet; accessed on 15 June 2005.

¹⁸³ "Colombian Towns Still Skeptical of 'Plan Patriota,'" 25 May 2004, FBIS, accession no. LAP2004052500038.

¹⁸⁴ Personal correspondence received from a retired Colombian military officer with more than thirty years experience.

had abandoned its ideological beliefs and devolved into a criminal enterprise would have more credibility. However, the fact that the FARC-EP did in fact attempt to create political structures that resemble those of a conventional nation-state, and acted in ways consistent with those of a governing force, argues in favor of the organization's continued claims to be a revolutionary organization that aspires to political power.

C. IDEOLOGICAL

Following the collapse of the peace talks and dissolution of the *despeje*, the Government of Colombia characterized the insurgency as a “narcoterrorist” organization, devoid of any political ambition, and motivated exclusively by an unquenchable thirst for greater illicit revenues. However, whereas the average guerrilla’s commitment to the organization’s ideological beliefs has definitely been weakened in the last five-to-ten-years, this is not due to the insurgency’s participation in the drug trade and related criminal activities, but rather is a consequence of three factors.

First, the quality of recruits who joined the guerrilla organization during the period 1995-2002 was of an inferior quality. Recruited from the poorest and most isolated regions of the country, many of the new recruits were children under the age of fifteen. In fact, Human Rights Watch assesses that in 2003 approximately 4,100 of the FARC-EP’s estimated 16,500 rural guerrilla combatants were children.¹⁸⁵ When the urban-based militias are included, an additional 3,300 children appear in the guerrilla organization’s ranks. This means that more than 7,400 of the FARC-EP’s total estimated strength of 26,500 guerrillas are children. The child combatants’ immaturity and lack of preparedness for the emotional and psychological horrors of war often make them more of a burden on the organization than an asset.

Second, the rudimentary education of most of the FARC-EP’s recruits, ninety percent of whom are peasants or indigenous peoples who possess only one or two years of primary school education, prevents them from comprehending the organization’s complex ideological beliefs.¹⁸⁶ FARC-EP commander Iván Ríos explains:

¹⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch, *You'll Learn Not to Cry: Child Combatants in Colombia* (Washington, D.C.: Human Rights Watch, 2003), 21.

¹⁸⁶ Ferro Medina and Uribe Ramón, *El Orden de la Guerra*, 65.

I think that the main difficulty that we have, and not only at the leadership level, but also at the level of the average guerrilla, is the low level of education. It's not that the people are stupid, but that they cannot retain everything that is being taught to them about the revolution. Also, due to their academic limitations, they may have a lot of difficulty understanding many things. This is not the only problem we have, but it is the main problem and the one with which we have the most difficulty.¹⁸⁷

As a result, the FARC-EP is currently producing guerrillas who are competent warriors skilled in the tactics of guerrilla warfare and the handling of explosives. However, they seldom comprehend the political ideology of the organization or the purpose for which they are fighting. Hence the common refrain that, “the FARC is a military giant and a political dwarf.” This situation, if left unchecked, could degrade the organization as the success of the insurgency as a political actor will depend upon its members’ ability to articulate the social, political, and economic aspirations of the movement. If the guerrillas are ill-educated in these political objectives or in the strategies to achieve them, the insurgency’s ability to rally supporters to the FARC-EP’s cause and maintain discipline and morale over time will be severely diminished.

Third, due to increased operations tempo, the insurgency has had neither the time nor the opportunity to hold its daily political meetings. As a result, the time that would have been dedicated to discussing subjects of political interest or to clarifying the FARC-EP’s political or ideological beliefs is no longer available. This has had a negative impact on the average guerrilla’s understanding of the movement’s ideological beliefs. FARC-EP commander Yesid Arteta explained in 2002:

Eight or ten years ago, the FARC’s operations tempo was more spread out, that is we can remember that some guerrilla fronts participated in an average of two to three military engagements each year. What did that allow? It allowed for greater emphasis on the political qualification and military training of the combatants. You have to recognize that...since the attack on *Casa Verde*, in the *el Duda* region, there has been an unleashing of guerrilla forces throughout the entire country. This is without precedence in the entire history of the guerrilla struggle in Colombia.

¹⁸⁷ Ferro Medina and Uribe Ramón, *El Orden de la Guerra*, 85-86.

The FARC's military requirements are reflected in the fact that there isn't enough time to provide the guerrilla combatants with a greater understanding of the ideological or political aspects of the organization, nor to dedicate to the political qualification of the guerrillas.¹⁸⁸

The poor academic preparation of the guerrillas and their youth and ignorance of the insurgency's ideological beliefs and political objectives have already proven to be a problem. This was evidenced in San Vicente del Caguán where local residents were reported to have complained about the guerrillas' below-average intellectual capacity and shortsightedness.¹⁸⁹ These impediments prevented the guerrillas from understanding the needs of the people and reinforced intangible, socio-cultural barriers that ultimately undercut support for the insurgency. These cultural detractors, if left unchecked, could have a negative impact on the FARC-EP's ability, not only to recruit new members to its cause, but also to propagate its message. As a result, the guerrilla organization could run the risk of degenerating into a "revolutionary organization" without a cause.

D. RESOURCES

In an effort to fund the FARC-EP's urbanization of the conflict, provide for the sustenance of a growing army, and to pay for specialized training in urban guerrilla warfare and the use of explosives, the guerrilla organization continued to expand its involvement in the drug trade during the period 1998-2005. By 2000, 23 of the FARC-EP's 61 fronts were suspected of being active in coca cultivation zones and an additional six in opium producing areas.¹⁹⁰ Additionally, a recent United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) survey noted that "out of 189 municipalities where coca cultivation has been detected, guerrilla groups may be found in 162." The document does not specify, however, whether or not these groups were FARC-EP or ELN guerrillas."¹⁹¹

Of the estimated 86,000 hectares of coca produced in 2003, 46,605 hectares, or 54%, were cultivated in the top three coca-producing departments of Nariño, Guaviare,

¹⁸⁸ Ferro Medina and Uribe Ramón, *El Orden de la Guerra*, 87.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 86.

¹⁹⁰ International Crisis Group, "War and Drugs in Colombia," Latin America Report No. 11, 27 January 2005, page 9, accessed on 5 July 2005; available from <http://www.icg.org>; Internet.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

and Meta.¹⁹² The FARC-EP's Joint Western Command and Eastern Bloc exercise influence over these departments where at least 12 fronts and one mobile column are active.¹⁹³ Although the ELN and paramilitaries are also present in these regions, the FARC-EP maintains a dominant presence.

According to the International Crisis Group, 65 of the FARC-EP's 110 guerrilla units are involved either in coca or poppy cultivation.¹⁹⁴ The participation in the cultivation and taxation of these illicit crops, creation of drug laboratories for the processing of coca base and cocaine hydrochloride, and the organization's charge for allowing narco-traffickers to use guerrilla controlled clandestine airstrips and related infrastructure, allowed the FARC-EP in 2003 to earn between \$489 million and \$791.3 million dollars.¹⁹⁵ These figures, however, do not include FARC-EP dividends realized through its involvement in other illicit activities such as extortion, kidnapping, and bank robberies. When these are taken into consideration, the FARC-EP is estimated to have earned between \$960.7 million and \$1.7 billion dollars in 2003.¹⁹⁶

The FARC-EP's level of participation in the drug trade seems to vary throughout the country. In some sections of Colombia, such as in the departments of Caquetá, Guaviare, Putumayo, Nariño, and the Catatumbo region of Norte de Santander, the guerrilla organization "...completely controls cultivation, initial processing stages, and refining of cocaine, either providing security to refining facilities installed by drug traffickers or, according to official sources, running their own....The local economy in

¹⁹² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Colombia: Coca Cultivation Survey," (New York: United Nations, 2004), 15.

¹⁹³ The fronts belonging to the Joint Western Command (JWC) include the 6th, 8th, 29th, 30th, and 50th. The Jacobo Arenas Mobile Column also operates within the boundaries of the JWC. In the Eastern Bloc, there are 21 fronts. However, of those 21 only seven - owing to their geographic areas of influence - are likely to work directly with the JWC - the 40th, 26th, 43rd, 27th, 44th, 7th, and the 1st. Sources: Ferro Medina and Uribe Ramón, *El orden de la Guerra*, 52-53; Marks, "Colombian Army Counterinsurgency," 14.

¹⁹⁴ International Crisis Group, "War and Drugs in Colombia," 9. The ICG is "an independent, non-profit, multinational organization that conducts analytical research aimed at preventing and resolving deadly conflicts.

¹⁹⁵ *República de Colombia, Junta de Inteligencia (JIC)*, "Estimación de los ingresos y egresos de las FARC durante 2003 basados en información de inteligencia recolectada por las agencias del estado," (Bogotá: Ministerio de Defensa, 2005), 10, available from <http://alpha.mindefensa.gov.co/descargas/Documentos/Home/Finanzas%20de%20las%20Farc.pdf>; Internet; accessed 25 July 2005.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

many regions under FARC control is founded on coca base barter.”¹⁹⁷ Peñas Coloradas, and many other small towns located on the banks of the Caguán River in Caquetá, are examples of locations where the FARC-EP has implemented a monetary system based on the bartering of grams of coca paste or coca leaf.¹⁹⁸ However, in other parts of the country, the guerrilla organization’s involvement in the drug trade is limited to territorial control of the coca crops located within its sphere of influence and coca base processing.¹⁹⁹

At this time most observers agree that the FARC-EP has not developed the ability to engage in the international trafficking of drugs, but rather remains dependent upon a network of national and international narco-traffickers to move its product abroad. However, with the organization’s tremendous profits and growing monopolization of the drug trade, it may just be a matter of time before the organization acquires this ability. In fact, as contracting narco-traffickers to transport the FARC-EP’s drugs to other distribution points diminishes the insurgency’s profits and therefore reduces its ability to finance the war, it would be naïve to think that the guerrilla organization is not already making plans to one day supplant the “drug traffickers” with “guerrilla traffickers.”

1. FARC-EP’s Allocation of Resources

Despite the FARC-EP’s immersion in the drug trade, the “combination of profit and power” has not been detrimental or undermined the coherence of the guerrilla organization’s political agenda.²⁰⁰ In fact, the guerrilla organization remains as committed to achieving political power today as it was when the insurgency was created

¹⁹⁷ International Crisis Group, “War and Drugs in Colombia,” 10.

¹⁹⁸ Carlos Villalón, “Cocaine Country,” *National Geographic* (July 2004): 34-54.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ Alexandra Guáqueta, “The Colombian Conflict: Political and Economic Dimensions” in *The Political Economy of Armed Conflict: Beyond Greed and Grievance*, ed. Karen Ballentine and Jake Sherman (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2003), 97.

on 27 May 1964. This will be illustrated by analyzing the FARC-EP's allocation of financial revenues as reported in the Colombian Joint Intelligence Group's 24 February 2005 report on FARC-EP finances.²⁰¹

According to the above mentioned document, in 2003 the FARC-EP spent between \$845,000 and \$2.5 million dollars on a trust fund created for captured guerrillas. An additional \$253,285 to \$633,214 dollars were given to assist the family members of detained guerrillas. The existence of such trust funds and pensions for captured personnel, are more commonly associated with military or state institutions rather than with criminal enterprises.

Similarly, the FARC-EP's spends between \$4,800 and \$7,200 dollars a year to maintain *twelve web pages in several languages*, where the organization publishes and disseminates revolutionary propaganda -- another characteristic generally not associated with a criminal organization.²⁰² In fact, criminal enterprises prefer to draw as little attention to themselves as possible and usually try to mask their presence by lurking in the shadows of everyday life. The FARC-EP, on the other hand, goes out of its way to proselytize not just Colombians, but also the entire international community. If the FARC-EP were a criminal organization, it would not maintain such a high profile or attempt to draw unwanted attention to itself. Only an organization that seeks outside support would participate in such activities.

In addition to the FARC-EP's numerous, multilingual web pages, the insurgency also operates five clandestine radio stations known as the "Voice of the Resistance" (*La Voz de la Resistencia*).²⁰³ According to Colombian Ministry of Defense, the guerrilla

201 *República de Colombia, Junta de Inteligencia (JIC)*, "Estimación de los ingresos y egresos de las FARC durante 2003 basados en información de inteligencia recolectada por las agencias del estado," (Bogotá: Ministerio de Defensa, 2005), 8, available from http://alpha.mindefensa.gov.co/descargas/Documentos_Home/Finanzas%20de%20las%20Farc.pdf; Internet; accessed 25 July 2005.

202 "Las guerrillas de las FARC se gasta menos de la mitad de sus ingresos anuales," *El Tiempo* (Bogotá) 31 January 2005, available from <http://eltiempo.terra.com.co>; Internet; accessed on 3 February 2005.

203 *Ibid.*

organization in 2003 invested between \$97,500 and \$154,000 dollars to maintain these illegal radio stations. As with the FARC-EP's use of the internet, the radio stations originate within Colombia, but can be received via shortwave radio throughout the world.

The insurgency also invested an estimated \$116,785 to \$286,785 dollars in conferences, meetings, and propaganda designed to rally domestic and international support behind the FARC-EP. The above amount also included fees associated with the publication of the organization's bi-monthly magazine *Resistance (La Resistencia)*. The FARC-EP's use of the mass media to disseminate its political beliefs and to search for individuals who are sympathetic to its cause has been nothing less than impressive. Such actions illustrate the organization's ongoing efforts to propagate the legitimacy of its struggle.

Finally, the FARC-EP invested an estimated \$101,314 to \$170,228 dollars in its so-called International Commission. This group of senior FARC-EP representatives, formerly under the leadership of now captured guerrilla leader alias Rodrigo Granda, is charged with disseminating the FARC-EP's political and ideological beliefs to sympathetic international audiences and with procuring resources from abroad. However, in recent years, the Government of Colombia has been able to deal a significant blow to the International Commission by capturing some of its representatives. Nevertheless, the International Commission continues to function and remains a vital component of the FARC-EP's strategy for convincing the international community of the morality of its struggle.

As can be seen from the above examples, the FARC-EP continues to utilize its financial resources in ways consistent with those of a revolutionary organization and not of a criminal enterprise. The guerrilla organization's continued attempts to secure support from abroad illustrate its desperation to prove the legitimacy of its cause. Similarly the FARC-EP's efforts illustrate its need to appeal to outside sources for recognition as a political actor. However, in the post September 11 environment, the guerrilla organization's chances of securing the aid of any state, save those rogue nations at odds with the United States such as Cuba or Iran, are minimal. Nevertheless, the

FARC-EP will likely continue to establish alliances with other Latin American based leftist organizations and other groups sympathetic to the guerrilla organization's struggle for political power.

E. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has argued that the FARC-EP, despite its continued involvement in the drug trade and participation in other illicit activities, remains a revolutionary organization whose final objective is the attainment of political power. This has been illustrated by examining the organization's participation in the failed peace talks of 1998-2002 and its disingenuous use of the *despeje*. In both cases, it has been shown that the FARC-EP acted to further its political-military objectives and to advance its revolutionary cause.

Evidence of the FARC-EP's efforts to create the so-called "New Colombia" has recently come to light as a result of the Colombian military's advance into the rearguard of the insurgency. As a result of these operations, the FARC-EP's alternate societies or shadow governments have been revealed to the public for the first time. In these areas, the FARC-EP has supplanted the state as the de facto governing force and taken measures to create a new and competing society that directly challenges the legitimacy of the Colombian state. These examples clearly illustrate the political intentions of the insurgency and dispel arguments which suggest that the organization has abandoned its ideological beliefs and devolved into a criminal organization.

Nevertheless, the increased ops tempo, large recruitment of child combatants, and limited education and cultural awareness of the vast majority of FARC-EP combatants are in fact having a negative effect on the organization's ideological underpinnings. Today's guerrilla combatants, despite their proficiency as experienced warriors, do not understand the political, social, or economic reasons for their ongoing struggle. More importantly, they are unable to articulate the insurgency's professed solutions to the nation's social ills. If left unchecked, this could result in the organization's degeneration into a rebel organization without a cause.

Finally, by means of financial analysis this chapter has illustrated that the FARC-EP continues to utilize its revenues for the attainment of political power. This has been

evidenced by citing examples of the FARC-EP's efforts, via the use of the internet, radio, and other means of communication, to propagate its faith, win new adherents to its cause, and morally justify its struggle for "social justice" to the international community. Such actions, which are inconsistent with those of a criminal organization, illustrate the insurgency's efforts to disseminate its revolutionary message and defend itself against those who would accuse it of abandoning its revolutionary cause.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This thesis has argued that the FARC-EP is currently a hierarchically organized, politically motivated, and ideologically driven insurgency whose strategic objectives include the defeat of the Colombian military, the toppling of the central government, and the establishment of a socialist regime founded on Marxist-Leninist and “Bolivarian” principles. It challenges those who allege that the insurgent group has degenerated into a criminal organization driven by a desire to maximize profits earned through its participation in illicit activities. While recognizing the important role that resources earned from criminal activities have played in strengthening the FARC-EP’s challenge to the government, this thesis argues that the guerrilla organization’s involvement in the drug trade serves exclusively as a means to an end.

To ensure the guerrillas’ commitment to their cause and to prevent their degeneration into a criminal organization, the senior leadership of the FARC-EP centralized power in the Secretariat and *Estado Mayor Central*. It also implemented a draconian disciplinary system known as the *Reglamento de Régimen Disciplinario* that executes members who fail to adhere to the principles of the organization. In this way, the FARC-EP has been able to maintain discipline of the insurgency and prevent its degeneration into a criminal organization.

However, recent changes in leadership as well as the recruitment of non-ideologically motivated and poorly educated fighters have led to the weakening of the ideological commitment of the base. Additionally, the increased operations tempo has prevented the insurgency’s leadership from dedicating sufficient time to the political indoctrination of guerrilla combatants. Consequently, many of the FARC-EP’s newer recruits, while skilled guerrilla combatants, are poorly educated in the political goals of the insurgency. This, combined with the weakening of organization’s leadership could, if left unaddressed, result in the weakening of the ideological foundation of the insurgency, internal fragmentation, and devolution of the FARC-EP into several, small criminal enterprises.

A. CONCLUSIONS

1. Political-Military

Since the FARC-EP's Seventh Guerrilla Conference in 1982, the insurgency has proven itself to be a remarkably adaptable organization capable of adjusting its political-military strategy and *modus operandi* to respond to the changing dynamics of Colombia's conflict. Examples include the insurgency's decision to implement the "new method of operating" in 1996, to shift from guerrilla warfare to maneuver warfare in the same year, and the requirement to pass from the strategic offensive to the strategic defensive in 2003. In each case, the senior-leadership of the FARC-EP analyzed carefully the current situation and initiated changes that it felt would best advance the insurgency's objectives and guarantee its continued survival.

Today, the FARC-EP continues to show that it still possesses the ability to adapt to and overcome adversities. In light of the Colombian Military's offensive, the guerrilla organization has dispersed its forces and once again reverted to guerrilla warfare. Additionally, it has abandoned direct attacks in favor of indirect attacks and placed a premium on the use of stand-off weapons such as mortars, booby traps, landmines, and improvised explosive devices. This *modus operandi*, which reduces the FARC-EP's exposure, thereby improving its survivability, has allowed the guerrillas to flee from the pursuing soldiers while inflicting on them significant psychological and physical damage.

The FARC-EP, although weakened by the Colombian Military's offensive, has not been defeated. Rather, it has decided to trade space for time to allow for the Colombian Military to exhaust its financial and military resources. The senior leadership of the FARC-EP is well aware that the Colombian military offensive cannot continue indefinitely. Nor will the United States, especially in light of its reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and now Louisiana, be able to sustain the same level of financial support for the Government of Colombia's war against the guerrilla organization. Therefore, the insurgency is simply biding its time and waiting for the moment when Plan Colombia associated funds are exhausted and the Colombian Military is extended beyond its operational limits. Once that moment arrives, the FARC-EP will regroup and attack the weakened military forces.

In the meantime, the insurgency, well aware of its need to take the war to the so-called “Gordian knot of contradictions” – the nation’s cities – will likely continue to infiltrate personnel into Colombia’s primary and secondary cities. As in 2003, the FARC-EP will likely conduct high-profile terrorist attacks against civilian and military targets located in these urban centers. Discotheques, exclusive bars and restaurants, and other well-known locations will likely continue to appear on the FARC-EP’s target lists.

Finally, the insurgency will continue to pressure the Government of Colombia to concede to a new *despeje* or demilitarized zone and will likely precondition future peace talks on its establishment. However, if the FARC-EP does in fact participate in these talks, it will not negotiate in good faith, but rather will take advantage of the time and space afforded it to advance its political-military objectives. The FARC-EP will also continue to clamor for recognition as a political organization and belligerent force and will mount a propaganda campaign to pressure congress into approving a prisoner exchange law. Above all, so long as the senior leadership of the FARC-EP remains in power, the insurgency will not demobilize, hand in its weapons, or renounce its attempt to acquire revolutionary power. However, a less ideologically-motivated and younger generation of guerrilla combatants may pursue an alternate course of action.

2. Ideology

Whereas the FARC-EP is currently a politically-motivated and ideologically driven guerrilla insurgency, at least three factors threaten to undermine the movement’s commitment to its revolutionary principles. First, the quality of the recruits has dropped in the last five-to-ten years and has resulted in the influx of an estimated 7,000 child combatants.²⁰⁴ These individuals, many of whom were recruited between the ages of ten and fifteen, are neither mentally nor physically prepared for the horrors of war. Nor did they join the insurgency for ideological purposes, but rather to escape abusive home environments, poverty, social-economic and class discrimination, and little chance of upward social mobility.²⁰⁵ Other factors which motivated these children to join the

²⁰⁴ Human Rights Watch (HRW), *You’ll Learn Not to Cry: Child Combatants in Colombia* (New York: HRW, 2003), 35-40.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

insurgency included the opportunity to handle a weapon and to use walkie-talkies – both of which are recognized as symbols of power in the rural and impoverished areas of Colombia.

Second, the limited education and cultural understanding of the vast majority of FARC-EP combatants, ninety per cent of whom are *campesinos* or peasant farmers, prevent most insurgents from comprehending the guerrilla movement's complex ideological beliefs.²⁰⁶ Many insurgents cannot read or write and, so are incapable of digesting the teachings of Karl Marx or Joseph Lenin, not to mention the philosophical meanderings attributed to Simón Bolívar. Finally, the high operations tempo prevents the common guerrilla combatants or *guerrilleros rasos* from receiving their daily instruction in political ideology. The time that should be dedicated to discussing the FARC-EP's ideological beliefs or reviewing the teachings of the organization's founding fathers is instead utilized to plan and conduct offensive operations or, more recently, to flee from advancing soldiers.²⁰⁷ As a result, many of the current members of the FARC-EP, while possibly trained in the art of guerrilla warfare, little understand what they are fighting for, nor what the FARC-EP will do if it attains political power.

Consequently, the FARC-EP is in serious danger of becoming a rebel movement without a cause or at least without a viable political strategy. Additionally, the loss of significant military leadership because of the Colombian military's offensive against the guerrilla organization, is removing the small percentage of guerrilla leaders who focus the ideological beliefs of the FARC-EP. Therefore, unless the senior leaders address these issues, the guerrilla organization, *in the long-term*, runs the risk of losing its ideological compass.

3. Organizational Dynamics

There are three factors which hold the FARC-EP together and prevent it from devolving into a criminal enterprise: first, strong senior- and mid-level leadership; second, the stern enforcement of the organization's draconian disciplinary code; and third, the centralization of authority. However, many factors including the advancement

²⁰⁶ Juan Guillermo Ferro and Graciela Uribe, *El orden de la guerra* (Bogotá: Centro Editorial Javeriano, CEJA, 2002), 64.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 87.

in age of many of the insurgency's senior leaders, the arrest, extradition, and/or assassination of mid-level commanders, and, the promotion of ill-prepared rank-and-file guerrilla combatants to positions of authority are weakening the command structure of the FARC-EP. Consequently, the cohesion of the guerrilla organization is likely to weaken over time and result in the inability of the future leadership to maintain control over some of its units. This in turn could undermine the command authority and centralization of power within the insurgency and cause the guerrilla organization to descend into criminality.

Manuel Marulanda Vélez, the charismatic leader of the FARC-EP, has become a legend in Colombia. He has taken on mythic proportions comparable to those of other Latin American revolutionary leaders such as Fidel Castro, Ernesto "Ché" Guevara, and Carlos Marighella. Songs and stories recount his legendary exploits, while paintings by world renowned artists such as Fernando Botero, immortalize him as the eternal revolutionary.

But Marulanda, now seventy-five years old, is quickly coming to the end of his quixotic adventure. While there have been rumors that a successor may have been named already, no one will ever be able to replace the charismatic leader. Marulanda's death will likely weaken the foundation upon which the FARC-EP is built and cause some to reconsider their commitment to the struggle.

Additionally, the recent arrest, extradition, and/or assassination of some senior- and mid-level FARC-EP commanders have weakened the command structure of the guerrilla organization.²⁰⁸ Replacing these leaders will be difficult and could result in the promotion of ill-prepared and unqualified guerrillas to positions of authority. This is due to the fact that promotions within the FARC-EP are very slow -- especially for those awaiting command positions. In fact, most guerrillas have to invest ten to fifteen years in the insurgency and prove themselves in battle before they are given command of a

²⁰⁸ In 2003 alone, numerous guerrilla leaders including the organization's chief of financial affairs, alias Simón Trinidad, and the Southern Bloc's financial officer, alias Sonia, were arrested and later extradited to the United States on drug trafficking charges. Other guerrilla leaders, including the former commander of the 46th front, alias Fidel Romero, and the former political ideologue of the 9th front, alias Plotter, abandoned the movement and demobilized. Still others, including a well-known mid-level guerrilla commander and personal confidant to Jorge Briceño Suárez, alias Buen día, were killed in action.

guerrilla unit. However, with the demise of many of the senior- and mid-level commanders, the senior-leadership of the FARC-EP will be required to promote more junior and less ideologically educated members to positions of power. This will likely have a negative impact on the insurgency's war fighting capabilities and will complicate the indoctrination of future recruits. As a result, future FARC-EP units will probably not be as proficient in guerrilla warfare, or as ideologically driven, as those of today.

Another factor which has allowed the senior leadership of the insurgency to maintain strict control over its subordinate guerrilla combatants is the stern enforcement of the movement's strict disciplinary code – *el Reglamento de Régimen Disciplinario*. This code, combined with the swift implementation of revolutionary justice, discourages the vast majority of insurgents from acting in ways contrary to the wishes of his or her superior officer. The culture of fear that surrounds the *Reglamento de Régimen Disciplinario*, and the knowledge that guerrilla leaders or *cabecillas* will not hesitate to execute a “convicted” guerrilla, enforces insurgent compliance with the senior leadership's directives and the guerrilla organization's code of conduct.

Finally, the vertical command structure and centralization of power in the Secretariat and *Estado Mayor Central* (EMC), combined with strict adherence to the disciplinary code, ensure compliance with the senior-leadership's dictates. The use of *ayudantías*, or advisors, to ensure that commanders use their resources to accomplish the assigned political-military objectives, provides an additional layer of oversight and centralized control over the numerous FARC-EP units. Fear and the ever-present threat of punishment provide additional incentives to carry out assigned tasks and accomplish mission objectives.

4. Resources

Throughout the last twenty-three years (1982-2005), the FARC-EP has demonstrated remarkable entrepreneurial skills and an uncanny ability to take advantage including kidnapping for ransom, extortion, cattle rustling, and armed clientelism. However, the enterprise which has provided the FARC-EP with the largest share of its illicit revenues is the drug trade.

The insurgency earns hundreds of millions of dollars annually from its participation in this illicit industry. These profits, in turn, fuel the FARC-EP's war machine against the Government of Colombia. But interestingly, the guerrilla organization could earn even more money if it were to expand operations into international drug trafficking. One must ask, therefore, why the FARC-EP has not taken this next logical step?

One possible explanation might be that the FARC-EP realizes that if it were to create an international drug distribution network it would immediately attract the wrath of the international community. The United States, in particular, might direct its military efforts at destroying the FARC-EP and ending its control on the drug trade. Therefore, the insurgency prefers to maintain the status quo and to limit its involvement in the drug trade to less attention-grabbing activities.

Given the FARC-EP's proven ability constantly to seek out and participate in profitable business ventures, it is likely that the insurgency will continue to diversify its participation in the drug trade and other illegal activities. In this manner, the FARC-EP will diminish its reliance upon coca for an estimated forty five per cent of its income and diversify its involvement in other emerging illicit markets.²⁰⁹ This, in turn, will allow the organization to continue its war against the government and expand simultaneously its control over the country.

The revenues derived from the organization's ever-diversifying involvement in illicit activities may in fact provide the FARC-EP with a distinct advantage over its economically-strapped and resource-poor enemy, the Government of Colombia. Decreasing financial support for internationally sponsored counter drug/counterterrorism programs such as Plan Colombia could further undermine the Government of Colombia's effort to defeat the guerrilla organization and allow the insurgency to get the upper hand. In the end, the FARC-EP may be able to out-resource the government and, via the purchase of high-tech military equipment and guns-for-hire, buy its way to victory.

²⁰⁹ International Crisis Group (ICG), "Presidential Politics and Peace Prospects," Latin American Report No. 14 – 16 June 2005, 12.

Conversely, the ideological weakening of the insurgency and the ascension of unqualified leaders to positions of power could combine with the FARC-EP's diversification of illegal market assets and result in the disintegration of the insurgency into numerous criminal organizations. The guerrilla organization's ability to indoctrinate its personnel and to appoint qualified individuals to senior- and mid-ranking positions will determine whether or not this occurs.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

The nature of the insurgent threat confronting the Government of Colombia calls for the implementation of a comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy that, while focused on defeating the FARC-EP on the battlefield, also contemplates the resolution of those political, economic, social, and cultural problems which led to its emergence. As such, the Government of Colombia should continue to attack the symptoms of the conflict – the FARC-EP – while seeking simultaneously to treat its causes – social and economic inequality, poor distribution of land, poverty, and state abandonment. Additionally, the Colombian military should adjust its strategy in order to conceptualize the enemy for what it is – a self-funded, autonomous, communist insurgency that is driven by a desire for political power. Finally, greater efforts should be made to freeze the financial assets of the insurgency and neutralize its leadership.

1. Attack the Leadership and Conduct Psychological Operations

According to the Government of Colombia, the FARC-EP presently consists of approximately 22,000 insurgents – 12,000 of whom are rural, guerrilla combatants while the remainder consists of members assigned to the urban guerrilla militias. However, of the estimated 22,000 insurgents only a very small percentage – probably less than five per cent – occupies positions of command authority within the insurgency. These individuals, found at the senior- and mid-levels of command, represent the political-military and ideological backbone of the insurgency and are one of the FARC-EP's centers of gravity. If they could be eliminated, the FARC-EP would likely find themselves rudderless.

The Colombian military should focus its efforts on eliminating the principal leaders of the insurgency. By removing the so-called "brain trust" of the organization, the military would inflict an irrecoverable blow to the insurgency that would probably

lead to its disintegration. Additionally, the sudden disappearance and/or removal of these leaders from their positions of power would create great tumult within their respective units and instill a sense of panic or fear in the surviving guerrillas.

Psychological operations, which currently target primarily the rank and file, should be expanded to focus on the mid-level guerrilla leaders. [See Figures 7 and 8 for examples of the leaflets which urge rank-and-file guerrillas to desert and demobilize.] While themes which presently emphasize familial abandonment, malnourishment, physical and sexual abuse, humiliation, and disillusionment will likely continue to convince low-ranking guerrillas to desert, a different strategy will probably be required to convince mid-ranking guerrilla leaders – who have more of a stake in the organization -- to demobilize.²¹⁰ Since this stake may be ideological or material (or a combination of the two), psychological operations will have to target both possible motives.

Instead of using mass distributed leaflets, the Colombian military should send personally addressed letters to the commanders of the FARC-EP's fronts, columns, and companies urging them to demobilize. These should be professionally written documents that are signed by senior-ranking military officers. In this manner, the mid-level FARC-EP commanders will feel that they are being treated respectfully and with regard for the positions that they occupy. However, instead of focusing on some of the above mentioned themes, the letters to the commanders should address their disillusionment with the armed struggle. Emphasis should be placed upon the amount of blood that has been spilled on both sides of the conflict as well as the suffering of the Colombian people. The authors of these letters should write in such a manner that the FARC-EP commander is forced to question his commitment to the struggle and the “benefits” that four decades of prolonged guerrilla warfare have brought to the nation. Such an

²¹⁰ For more information on the Government of Colombia's highly successful and robust psychological operations campaign see “*Con canciones y publicidad, el Gobierno ha atraído a los combatientes para que se desmovilicen*,” *El Tiempo* (Bogotá), 21 September 2005, Internet version; Government of Colombia, *Programa de Atención Humanitaria al Desmovilizado, “Estratégia Comunicacional: Prevención y Desmovilización de Organizaciones Armadas Ilegales,”* Power Point Presentation.

approach will cause the reader to reflect upon the war, its casualties, and the damage that has been done to the country. This, in turn, may cause some leaders to dissent and demobilize.



It states, "Recover your Spot: Your family, your country, liberty, life, and new opportunities await you."

Figure 7. The Front of a Widely Distributed Leaflet Urging Guerrillas to Demobilize



This side urges the guerrilla not to hesitate any longer, but rather to demobilize immediately. Instructions are provided as to how the insurgent can make contact with the Government.

Figure 8. The Back of the Same Leaflet

2. Attack the FARC-EP's Financial Resources

The Government of Colombia must curtail the FARC-EP's access to its financial resources. This could be accomplished by continuing to attack the insurgency's primary source of revenues – illicit crops – and by gaining control of the group's financial assets. Currently, there are two institutions within the Government of Colombia that specialize

in the tracking, analysis, and seizure of financial assets belonging to subversive organizations: the Information and Financial Analysis Unit (UIAF) and the Inter-institutional Committee for the Study of Subversive Finances. The Government of Colombia should increase its support for these institutions and grant them greater legal authority to seize assets suspected of belonging to the FARC-EP. Additionally, these institutions should improve their cooperation with international law enforcement agencies. Finally, the Government of Colombia should pressure the public and private sectors not to submit to extortion, which provides financial resources for the FARC-EP. In exchange for compliance with the government's policies, the central government should provide cooperative organizations with increased security and redouble its efforts to uncover the guerrilla units responsible for extorting these entities. Only by guaranteeing the safety of these sectors from FARC-EP reprisals will the government be able to deny the insurgency access to revenues.

3. “Know Your Enemy”

In 500 B.C., the Chinese general, Sun Tzu, admonished his followers to “know their enemy.” He stated, “If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.”²¹¹ These words, which were written more than 2,500 years ago, continue to be valid today and explain one of the many reasons why the Colombian military has been unable to defeat the FARC-EP.

For the last forty-one years, the Colombian military has considered the FARC-EP to be nothing more than a group of “delinquents” or “bandits.” As such, they have prescribed military strategies aimed at defeating a criminal enterprise rather than a guerrilla insurgency. This failure to “know their enemy” and to understand how the FARC-EP operates has led to the prolongation of the conflict and the unintentional strengthening of the insurgency. Alfredo Rangel, a Colombian political scientist and expert on the internal war, explains:

²¹¹ “Sun Tzu on The Art of War: The Oldest Military Treaties in the World,” trans. Lionel Giles, available from <http://www.chinapage.com/sunzi-e.html>; Internet; accessed on 17 August 2005.

This equivocated definition of their adversary has prevented the military forces from conducting what Clausewitz referred to as the “critical analysis” of the conflict. Such an analysis is necessary in order to understand the conflict’s dynamics and to identify the proper objectives. “Critical analysis,” according to this theoretician of war, has a few main elements: describing and interpreting facts, tracing effects to their causes, and evaluating the applied methods. In fact, in spite of having access to invaluable, first-rate information, the military forces have been unable to construct a comprehensive image of the guerrillas, as it is that one can know nothing about the adversary when one deals exclusively with immobile stereotypes.²¹²

The political nature of the FARC-EP requires that the Colombian military revisit its conceptualization of the guerrilla organization and the insurgency’s *modus operandi*. For unlike a criminal organization, a guerrilla insurgency operates simultaneously on multiple levels - including the political, economic, social, and cultural.²¹³ Therefore, given this fact, the Colombian military, with the assistance of the National Police and other state institutions, should study all levels of the conflict in order to determine if and/or how the FARC-EP may be operating within these realms. Once this determination has been made, the Colombian military will be better prepared to design a counterinsurgency strategy capable of countering the FARC-EP’s actions.

4. Address Legitimate Social Grievances

Since the FARC-EP’s inception in 1964, the insurgency has clamored for the state’s redress of what it perceives to be are numerous social injustices. Two of these include the unfair distribution of land and the lack of state presence in rural areas. Both of these issues, which most inhabitants of Colombia’s countryside consider to be legitimate social grievances, undercut support for the government, weaken the state’s legitimacy, and, by default, strengthen the insurgent cause. Therefore, in order for the Government of Colombia to increase its support among the rural populace and to counter the FARC-EP’s influence, the state should double its efforts to carry out agrarian reform and increase its investment in the development of the social infrastructure of the nation’s rural communities. By strengthening the state’s presence in those isolated areas and

²¹² Alfredo Rangel, *Guerra Insurgente* (Bogotá: Intermedio Editores, 2001), 422.

²¹³ John Baylis, “Revolutionary Warfare,” *Contemporary Strategy II: The Nuclear Powers*, vol.2 rev. and enl., ed. John Baylis, Ken Booth, John Garnett, and Phil Williams (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1987), 212.

providing for the economic and social well-being of its inhabitants, the Government of Colombia will likely be able to win more adherents to its cause while denying them to the FARC-EP.

One of the problems which has continued to afflict Colombian society, and has served as one of the primary incentives of the FARC-EP's rebellion against the government, is the perennial issue of land tenure. Historically, this conflict has its roots in the peasant farmer or *campesino*'s inability to purchase or acquire the legal titles to the lands on which he worked. This was later complicated by the arrival of wealthy feudal landlords who purchased vast tracks of land, evicted the local peasants, and transformed the local economies.

Today, land tenure continues to be a divisive issue within society. According to the International Crisis Group, 1.3 per cent of the population owns 48 per cent of the best land.²¹⁴ Additionally, 4.4 million hectares, valued at \$2.4 billion dollars, and accounting for 43 per cent of the nation's arable land is owned by narcotraffickers.²¹⁵ Of this 43 per cent, only nine per cent is cultivated while the remaining amount (more than 5 million hectares) is left unattended or underutilized.²¹⁶ By purchasing large tracts of virgin land and not developing the properties, the narcotraffickers inflate the value of their estates and create a virtual monopoly on land ownership in rural Colombia.

As a result of this “perverse agrarian revolution,” which “...has concentrated the best land in the hands of the few, displaced the traditional farmer population and social structure, and hurt productive agriculture, as the land controlled by drug dealers is generally used for cattle-ranching,” local peasant farmers have been forced to abandon their native lands and relocate to other parts of the country.²¹⁷ In many cases these *campesinos*, possessing limited education and desperate to earn a living by whatever means possible, have settled in “frontier” areas where coca production is the main means

²¹⁴ International Crisis Group (ICG), “War and Drugs in Colombia,” Latin America Report No. 11, 27 January 2005 (London” ICG, 2005), 5.

²¹⁵ Nazih Richani, Systems of Violence: The Political Economy of War and Peace in Colombia (Albany: State University of New York, 2002), 34.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ International Crisis Group (ICG), “War and Drugs in Colombia,” 5.

of employment. For example, 578,000 people, eager to take advantage of the economic benefits associated with the so-called “*bonanza cocalera*,” settled in southeastern Colombia between 1988 and 1993.²¹⁸ There they worked for the FARC-EP as *raspachines* or coca leaf pickers and indirectly assisted the insurgency in prosecuting its war against the government.

As can be seen, issues associated with land tenure continue to be a major problem which fuels the fire of the ongoing internal conflict. Although only twenty-five per cent of the Colombian population resides in the countryside, according to FARC-EP commander Fernando Caicedo, *ninety percent* of the insurgency’s recruits are drawn from this disaffected group.²¹⁹ Therefore, in order for the Government of Colombia to dissuade the rural populace from supporting the FARC-EP and to prevent potential recruits from joining its ranks, the state should redouble its efforts to conduct an agrarian land reform aimed at expropriating territory from the narcotraffickers and redistributing it among the nation’s peasant farmers.

In addition to the above recommendation, the state should also endeavor to improve the social infrastructure of the nation’s rural communities and of those areas formerly under guerrilla control or influence. In particular, emphasis should be placed upon the provision of basic social services including safe and stable supplies of drinking water, electricity, functioning sanitation facilities, and access to hospitals and clinics.²²⁰ Additionally, the state should construct roads and bridges which link the isolated communities with the larger towns and cities. In this manner, rural inhabitants will be able to ship their agricultural products to nearby towns and sell them on the local markets. This, in turn, will increase their income and improve their overall quality of life.²²¹ Finally, the state should build more educational and vocational facilities. By

²¹⁸ International Crisis Group (ICG), “War and Drugs in Colombia,” 5.

²¹⁹ Juan Guillermo Ferro and Graciela Uribe, *El orden de la guerra* (Bogotá: Centro Editorial Javeriano, CEJA, 2002), 64.

²²⁰ Association of the U.S. Army and Center for Strategic and International Studies, “Post-Conflict Reconstruction, Task Framework,” May 2002, copyright 2001, available from <http://www.csis.org/isp/pcr/framework.pdf>; Internet; accessed on 20 July 2005.

²²¹ Anthony James Joes, *Resisting Rebellion: The History and Politics of Counterinsurgency* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 2004), 235.

providing the rural populace with access to a good education and/or teaching them a vocational skill, the government will provide them with the possibility of improving their livelihood and attaining upward social mobility. This, in turn, will encourage the populace to work and invest in their communities and will instill in them a sense of appreciation and loyalty to the state.²²²

At this time, the Government of Colombia is receiving financial support from various international organizations such as the World Bank and the U.S. Agency for International Development.²²³ However, rather than focusing the majority of this aid on the development of the countryside, the Government of Colombia continues to emphasize urban development. While this makes sense, especially considering that seventy-five percent of Colombia's population resides in the nation's primary and secondary cities, greater attention needs to be placed upon the development of those areas from which the FARC-EP derives the majority of its recruits. By improving the socio-economic opportunities and living conditions in which Colombia's rural inhabitants reside, the government may be able to diminish support for the FARC-EP, stem the flow of new recruits to the insurgency, and strengthen the legitimacy of the state.

²²² Derived from Human Rights Watch (HRW), *You'll Learn Not to Cry: Child Combatants in Colombia* (New York: HRW, 2003), 35-40.

²²³ The World Bank, "Colombia Country Brief," available from www.worldbank.org/co; Internet; accessed on 23 August 2005 and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), "USAID/Colombia FY 2000-FY 2005," available from www.usaid.gov; Internet; accessed on 23 August 2005.

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